

*An Introductory Guide to Policy and Practice*

ECACL

## Education to Combat Abusive Child Labor

Basic Education and Policy Support (BEPS) Activity

 CREATIVE ASSOCIATES INTERNATIONAL



United States Agency for International Development

Contract No. HNE-I-00-00-00038-00

# *An Introductory Guide to Policy and Practice*

## **BASIC EDUCATION AND POLICY SUPPORT (BEPS) ACTIVITY**

The Basic Education and Policy Support (BEPS) Activity is a multi-year, worldwide indefinite quantity contract from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Center for Human Capacity Development (HCD). The BEPS activity is designed to be responsive to USAID's overall goal of "human capacity built through education and training" by supporting improved and expanded basic education, especially for girls, women, and other under-served populations. The Education to Combat Abusive Child Labor (ECACL) Activity is a major component of BEPS.

## **ECACL MISSION STATEMENT**

The mission of the ECACL activity is to provide technical, management and program assistance to USAID Missions, Regional Bureaus, the Global Bureau, and organizations in non-presence countries to combat abusive child labor throughout the world.

## **STRATEGY**

Using basic education as the principal tool, ECACL will address and combat abusive child labor situations by:

- ◆ providing technical assistance and advisory services;
- ◆ facilitating program planning and coordination;
- ◆ conducting applied research;
- ◆ organizing regional and/or country-specific conferences/workshops;
- ◆ implementing pilot projects; and
- ◆ developing information networks and dissemination systems.

## **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

The seven principles guiding ECACL activities are:

- ◆ Ensuring that activities undertaken address the short and long-term interest of child laborers and their families.
- ◆ Targeting children in the most abusive forms of child labor.
- ◆ Establishing a clear understanding of the context, needs and priorities.
- ◆ Ensuring collaboration through close dialogue and ongoing linkages with organizations dedicated to child labor prevention and advocacy.
- ◆ Applying a participatory approach that builds from the community-level up.
- ◆ Serving all areas of society regardless of gender, race, class, literacy, physical condition, and health status.
- ◆ Applying a level of excellence that ensures all program activities are implemented effectively with meaningful, measurable results.

THE OPINIONS EXPRESSED IN THIS DOCUMENT ARE THOSE OF THE WRITERS AND  
ARE NOT NECESSARILY SHARED BY USAID.

# EDUCATION TO COMBAT ABUSIVE CHILD LABOR

*AN INTRODUCTORY GUIDE TO POLICY AND PRACTICE*

THE BASIC EDUCATION AND POLICY SUPPORT (BEPS) ACTIVITY

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## FOREWORD

*“Child labor is the single most important source of child exploitation and child abuse in the world today. ”*

- International Labor Organization Conference Report, 1996

Children continue to be the most vulnerable in our world's society. While we live in an era of unprecedented global economic integration, competitive pressures feed the need for an ever-cheaper supply of labor, and child labor is the cheapest of all. In some countries, children laboring in situations of slavery, debt bondage, and servitude is not uncommon. Children being trafficked to work on plantations or into prostitution and forced into illegal activities is an all too common headline in today's news. The increased awareness and education of consumers and their demand for socially responsible production of goods and products, however, has helped to expose the insidious practices that have long been shadowed and hidden. This awareness has helped to expose other equally hazardous work activities that place a child's health, safety, and morals at risk. While globalization may be part of the problem, it also holds the key to countering this trend. Taking on this issue is a challenge to children and human rights, and economic and other development groups worldwide.

USAID's relatively recent entry into a field where many other national and international organizations are already acting, make it important to carefully and critically evaluate where USAID can bring some value-added contribution to combat abusive child labor. Decades of efforts and activities undertaken to address this problem have resulted in mixed success. While child labor in some sectors is in decline, in other sectors it persists and grows. Critical to continued and even greater progress is the need for a coordinated and holistic approach among development agencies and others at all levels to target the reasons why children work and address the root causes of the problem. Inherent to making progress is the need for a long-term commitment to sustainable, economic development that addresses the crisis of poverty within communities and families and provides access to free, quality basic education available for all children.

It is much noted by various experts that the welfare of children is a very sensitive indicator of whether economic development is reaching and benefiting the poor. The presence and extent of child labor is an important indicator of this type and therefore can be used to help USAID target its economic development and anti-poverty programming. By better understanding the causes and effects of abusive child labor and by pinpointing how USAID can have the most positive and cost-effective impact in redressing the problems in a child labor context, USAID can also achieve advancing its strategic goals for overall economic development in every beneficiary country.

Within its fiscal years 1999 and 2000 appropriations, USAID was directed to use a portion of its funding to begin initiatives to implement educational programs and activities to alleviate abusive child labor worldwide. This provides USAID the opportunity to undertake an initiative to integrate and coordinate child labor activities within the education component of its ongoing and planned Mission-level programs across the board—in education; women in development; democracy

and governance; human rights; health and nutrition; environmental management; economic growth; agriculture; HIV/AIDS; and other sectors of socio-economic development. Although new in the child labor prevention arena, USAID's extensive country presence in 85 countries and more than four decades of experience in basic education can compliment other ongoing child labor initiatives being undertaken by the US Department of Labor's International Labor Affairs Bureau, the International Labor Organization (ILO), the World Bank, the United Nations, and others.

One facet of USAID's new initiative in child labor is the Education to Combat Abusive Child Labor (ECACL) Activity, a new three-year effort under USAID's worldwide Basic Education and Policy Support (BEPS) Activity. BEPS is designed to support USAID Missions, Regional Bureaus, and, if appropriate, non-presence countries to improve basic education by providing assistance in education policy reform, child labor, crisis situations, and basic education. Creative Associates International, Inc. (CAII) leads BEPS and the ECACL activity.

The program of applied research that the ECACL activity is implementing was to begin with a synthesis paper that compiles a review and analysis of collected wisdom, best practices, and lessons learned concerning the reduction of abusive child labor, especially through education. In the process of developing this paper and following extensive dialogue in consultation with USAID officials, it was determined that given USAID's new undertaking in the child labor arena, an introductory guide to policy and programming would be helpful. This paper focuses on particular issues most critical for USAID when conducting an education program to combat abusive child labor and should not be considered as a primer on child labor in general.

This paper, "Education to Combat Abusive Child Labor: An Introductory Guide to Policy and Practice," is viewed as a first in a series. It will be followed by a "best practices summary" of research and program findings related to basic education and child labor. The third paper will review scholarships and other incentive programs and their contributions to combating abusive child labor and improving school retention. These papers are intended to be guides for USAID and others in planning child labor program activities and assisting host countries, USAID Missions, Regional Bureaus, and the Global Bureau to plan and implement innovative education activities to combat abusive child labor.

This paper provides an overview of the elements of a framework for mapping and considering key technical issues involved in planning USAID education programs to combat abusive child labor. Such a program is in many ways experimental because education has not been used just to focus on "the worst forms of child labor." A program of this type involves making normal education functions more generally sensitive to the needs and situations of working children, especially those in abusive work conditions, but also includes some activities specific to the targeted child labor sector or group. Because of the complexity of the subject and its general unfamiliarity to educators, this discussion focuses primarily on certain critical issues that must be dealt with in the early stages of planning education interventions in child labor. For this reason, it is really an introduction to, or first step toward, a planning framework rather than a suggested framework itself.



Additionally, this document is best described as a “collected wisdom” that reflects both a reasonable amount of literature and experience and a scarcity of formal evaluative material. In recent years, various organizations have sponsored studies that collect, review, and reflect upon existing information, from both experience and research, about child labor and education in relation to child labor, drawing conclusions and making recommendations. Given a lack of true evaluations, this paper draws heavily on that reflective secondary material and tries to summarize the central trends of thinking that arise out of it. A list of these reference sources is contained in the appendix. This paper is, therefore, an attempt to tap into the mainstreams of current information and opinion to derive a sense of the prevailing wisdom, with an emphasis on the leading edge of new information and changing thought.

Chapter I first summarizes child labor in the world today, and then moves to identify several important aspects of the world's political, social, and economic environment in which a USAID-sponsored activity will operate. Chapter II presents and critiques different ways of thinking about child labor that are common today and that act as policy frameworks for action to discourage abusive child labor. The points to be made are that there is no one “correct” policy framework for considering child labor or the most abusive forms of it, and that the different frameworks now in use tend to have somewhat different educational implications. The paper quite deliberately makes no suggestion regarding which of these frameworks, or combination of them, would be most appropriate for USAID or other donor initiatives. That should be open for discussion, and a decision is likely to depend on political as well as technical factors. Chapter III addresses the relationship between education and child labor, and the four major reasons why children work.

Chapter IV then outlines various education intervention approaches. Chapter V presents certain key processes that planners need to consider. One of the most significant efforts to date that is designed specifically to use education to eliminate or reduce the worst forms of child labor is the Basic Education for Hard to Reach Urban Children Project in Bangladesh. The final chapter includes a description of this program because it has a wide range of interventions and offers some insights for activities in other places. Any activity trying to use education to eliminate abusive child labor is at this time inevitably experimental, and needs to be planned and evaluated accordingly.

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## CONTENTS

<b>FOREWORD .....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>INDEX OF KEY TERMS .....</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>viii</b>
 <b>I. BACKGROUND .....</b>	 <b>1</b>
<b>Child Labor in the World Today: Defining the Problem .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The Planning Context .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<i>A Resurgence of International Interest in Child Labor .....</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>A New International Child Labor Convention .....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>A New and Expanding Emphasis on Child Rights .....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Changing Ideas about Children, Childhood, and Child Development .....</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Changing Expectations of Government, Civil Society, and the Private Sector .....</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Economic and Education Crises in Developing Countries .....</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Concerns about Multi-Lateral and Bi-Lateral Assistance Regarding Child Labor .....</i>	<i>8</i>
 <b>II. POLICY FRAMEWORKS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR .....</b>	 <b>9</b>
<b>The Labor Market Framework .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>The Human Capital Framework .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>The Social Responsibility Framework .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>The Child-centered Framework .....</b>	<b>16</b>
 <b>III. RELATION BETWEEN CHILD WORK AND EDUCATION .....</b>	 <b>19</b>
<b>Why Children Work: Primary Motivations .....</b>	<b>21</b>
<i>Motive 1: Children work to alleviate the effects of poverty. ....</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Motive 2: Children work in order to attend school. ....</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>Motive 3: Children work as a productive alternative when schools are</i> <i>unavailable or inferior. ....</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Motive 4: Children work to learn. ....</i>	<i>28</i>
<b>Recent Studies on the Relationship Between School and Work .....</b>	<b>30</b>

<b>IV. INTERVENTIONS THROUGH EDUCATION.....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Preventive Interventions: Keeping Children in School and Away from Abusive Work .31</b>	
1. <i>Clean up education's act so that it is not part of the problem. ....</i>	31
2. <i>Improve school quality and relevance. ....</i>	32
3. <i>Reach out to working children with special needs. ....</i>	32
<b>Protective Interventions: Helping Protect Working Children Against Abuse .....</b>	<b>33</b>
1. <i>Monitor the condition of working children.....</i>	33
2. <i>Enable children to better protect themselves.....</i>	33
3. <i>Support children through education for families, employers, and communities. ....</i>	34
<b>Developmental Interventions: Offering Children Opportunities .....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>V. ESSENTIAL PLANNING PROCESS.....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Situation Analysis .....</b>	<b>35</b>
<i>Essential Information.....</i>	35
<i>Understanding the Relationship Between Education and Child Labor.....</i>	36
<i>Organizing Successful Situation Analysis.....</i>	37
<b>Involving Stakeholders.....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Evaluating Impact: What Is a Satisfactory Child Labor Outcome? .....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>VI. THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN REDUCING ABUSIVE CHILD LABOR: THE BANGLADESH EXAMPLE .....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Lessons Learned .....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>ABOUT CREATIVE ASSOCIATES INTERNATIONAL, INC .....</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>ABOUT THE AUTHOR.....</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>SUGGESTED RESOURCES.....</b>	<b>47</b>



## INDEX OF KEY TERMS

<b>Axe</b>	Project Axe, Brazil (Pronounced “ah-SHAY,” meaning “life force”)
<b>BEPS</b>	Basic Education and Policy Support
<b>BRAC</b>	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
<b>CAII</b>	Creative Associates International, Inc.
<b>Convention No. 138</b>	International Labor Organization Convention on Minimum Age of Work, 1973
<b>Convention No. 182</b>	International Labor Organization Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labor, 1999
<b>CRC</b>	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
<b>CWC</b>	Concern for Working Children
<b>ECACL</b>	Education to Combat Abusive Child Labor
<b>GNP</b>	Gross National Product
<b>ILAB</b>	International Labor Affairs Bureau
<b>ILO</b>	International Labor Organization
<b>IPEC</b>	International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labor
<b>MOU</b>	Memorandum of Understanding
<b>MVF</b>	M. Venkatarangaiya Foundation
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental Organization
<b>SIMPOC</b>	International Labor Organization’s Statistical Information and, Monitoring Programme on Child Labour
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNDB</b>	United Nations Development Bank
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children’s Fund
<b>US</b>	United States
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development
<b>USDOL</b>	United States Department of Labor
<b>WB</b>	World Bank

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Within fiscal years 1999 and 2000 appropriations, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) was directed to use some of its funding to begin an initiative to implement educational programs and activities to alleviate abusive child labor worldwide. This new initiative provides an opportunity for USAID to interweave and coordinate child labor activities within its ongoing and planned Mission-level programs in democracy, governance and human rights, health and nutrition, education, environmental management, economic growth, agriculture, HIV/AIDS, and other sectors of socio-economic development. Although new in the child labor prevention arena, USAID's extensive on-the-ground, country presence in 85 countries and more than four decades of work on basic education can add significant value and augment other ongoing child labor initiatives being undertaken by US Department of Labor's International Labor Affairs Bureau, the International Labor Organization (ILO), the World Bank, United Nations (UN), and others.

The Education to Combat Abusive Child Labor (ECACL) Activity, a part of the worldwide Basic Education and Policy Support (BEPS) Activity, is a three-year effort to address child labor. Through BEPS, USAID supports USAID Missions, Regional Bureaus, and, if appropriate, non-presence countries in improving basic education by providing assistance in education policy reform, child labor, crisis situations, and basic education generally. Creative Associates International, Inc. (CAII) leads BEPS and the ECACL Activity.

Research and analysis under that activity, CAII commissioned the "Education to Combat Abusive Child Labor: An Introductory Guide to Policy and Practice." This document includes background on child labor in the world today and the context in which programs addressing child labor are currently needed, a summary of various policy framework options to address child labor, relationships between education and child work, education intervention approaches, essential planning processes, and a summary of recommendations for USAID consideration. The guide is a first in a series, to be followed by a "lessons learned summary" of research and program findings related to basic education and child labor and a review of scholarships and other incentives and their contributions to combating abusive child labor and improving school retention.

## BACKGROUND

### ***Child Labor in the World Today—Defining the Problem***

#### *International Agreements*

Two major definitions of child labor are being used today. One definition, whose roots lie within the International Labor Organization (ILO) Minimum Age Convention No. 138, represents child labor in terms of economic participation activities contributing to the Gross National Product under the UN System of National Accounts. This school of thought emphasizes child labor as children becoming economically active too young. A second view of child labor focuses on work that is harmful to children, regardless of age. This viewpoint sees the child labor problem as children being involved in activities or working under conditions that place them at serious risk to their health, safety, and morals. The roots of this view lie within the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention No. 182. Simply knowing how many children work does not help policy makers or program planners understand

which children are at risk or why they are working and not attending school. For policy purposes, this paper defines “abusive child labor” as that work which is detrimental to children and represents those worst forms of child labor as defined under Article 3 of the ILO Convention No. 182 and Article 32 of the CRC. Simply stated, children, especially young children, should not be engaged in abusive or the worst forms of child labor.

Convention No. 182 (1999) applies to all persons under the age of 18 and provides that each ratifying State shall take immediate and effective measures to secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labor. The worst forms include the following:

- (a) all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom, and forced or compulsory labor, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict;
- (b) the use, procuring, or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography, or for pornographic performances;
- (c) the use, procuring, or offering of a child for illicit activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs as defined in the relevant international treaties; and
- (d) work that, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety, or morals of children.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) Article 32 guarantees children the right to be protected from economic exploitation and “work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child’s education or to be harmful to the child’s health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.” It also obliges governments to regulate and enforce minimum age, hours, and conditions of employment. Article 28 guarantees the child’s right to compulsory, free primary education.

### *Global Picture*

Worldwide estimates are that 250 million children under 18 are working. Although a considerable amount of data is available on the economic participation of children, the findings generated from these data often lack specifics on work that is harmful to children. Sectors where the “worst forms” of child labor are found are left largely unexplored due to the difficulties and expenses involved in gathering this information. Globally, most children’s work is overwhelmingly rural and agricultural. Over two-thirds of working children are rural, and mostly in small farm agriculture. The next largest contingent of working children is comprised of domestic servants, commonly in households outside of their own. Children involved are predominantly girls. Girls commonly divide their work time between home care and farming tasks. There is a large contingent of child workers in the informal sectors of commerce and industry, where children may work either in family undertakings or as wage employees in non-family enterprises. Fewer than eight percent of all working children are involved in the production of export sector products and commodities. Most economically active children work for or with their family members and receive no monetary compensation. Older children work more than do younger ones. If heavy work in the home were included, the majority of working children would be girls. If one counts only economic participation, however, then there appear to be more boy than girl workers. More children who work do so only part-time. A large number of

children combine part-time work with school. Many work full-time during peak agricultural season and very little in between.

### *The Planning Context*

The circumstances of children's work and school activity vary according to the situation. The following contextual factors should be considered today:

- ◆ A resurgence of international interest in child labor, with the ILO, UNICEF, the World Bank, and various non-governmental organizations actively involved.
- ◆ A new international child labor convention, ILO Convention No. 182, Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labor, which was unanimously adopted by the ILO in 1999 (industrialized and developing countries alike) and ratified by nearly 90 countries including the US.
- ◆ A new and expanding emphasis on child rights, spearheaded by the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which articulates rights that apply to all policies and programs concerning children.
- ◆ Changing ideas about children, childhood, and child development, which acknowledges the role of culture in children's development and the importance of working children's own individual and collective participation in deciding and implementing measures to protect them from exploitation and abuse.
- ◆ Changing expectations of government, civil society, and the private sector, resulting in new considerations for collaborative efforts among governments, outside donors, the private sector, and not-for-profit organizations.
- ◆ Economic and education crises, and civil unrest in developing countries that generate child labor and limit the options for combating it.
- ◆ Concerns about diverting multi-lateral and bi-lateral assistance to reduce child labor when the poorest countries are struggling with the social fallout of economic globalization.

## **POLICY FRAMEWORKS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR**

Child labor today is approached from several different perspectives. It is important to understand these policy approaches and their historical origins because they are implicit in policy decisions.

- ◆ A labor market approach. Child labor is viewed as economic participation that discourages children's development (especially their education) and exposes them to unacceptable risk. Under this view, protection is best achieved by separating children from exposure to the dangers considered inherent in working.
- ◆ A human capital approach. Child labor is seen as a consequence of underdevelopment. Under this view, the main remedy to child labor is the elimination of poverty and its causes that push children into the workforce early.

- ◆ A social responsibility approach. Children's work is part of a system that excludes disadvantaged groups from full participation in the protection, benefits, and opportunities of society. Under this view, the solution lies in reinforcement of families, targeted programs for working children and their families, improved basic services, community monitoring of workplaces to discover and remedy abuses, children organized to defend their own interests, and political activism to make governments more responsive; and
- ◆ A child-centered approach. Child labor is valued according to children's interests and welfare first without filtering them through prior adult agendas. This approach has been brought to the fore by the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

Each approach provides a general policy framework of internally coherent generative concerns, objectives, target group priorities, strategies, and activities. Also, each provides a particular view of children, of work, and of the role and process of education. These different perspectives on child labor have at times been regarded as competitive with one another or mutually exclusive. In fact, however, it is increasingly clear that they can also complement one another. There is a trend toward pragmatic eclecticism that recognizes the advantages and limitations of each approach and chooses between them, or combines them, according to how usefully they fit the particular situation.

## RELATIONS BETWEEN CHILDWORK AND EDUCATION

Over the years, varied approaches have been undertaken to combat child labor. Over time, using education to combat child labor has risen to the forefront as the more effective strategy. Successful efforts to educate working children must take into account the reasons why they work. Four are especially important for educators to take into consideration and challenge education systems to respond in unaccustomed ways:

- ◆ Children work to alleviate the effects of poverty. Education must recognize and deal with the poverty factor that necessitates children's work, leaving opportunities for children to work as well as study.
- ◆ Children work in order to attend school. School systems must ease the economic burden of schooling on the poorest families and ensure that misappropriation of money, time, and materials are adequately addressed.
- ◆ Children work as a productive alternative when schools are unavailable or inferior. Reaching school-aged working children requires making education accessible and palatable.
- ◆ Children work to learn. Educators should plan educational activities within the broader context of children's multiple learning needs.

## INTERVENTIONS THROUGH EDUCATION

Three kinds of interventions evolve from the policy frameworks and the reasons why children work. Each type of intervention suggests certain steps to take.

### **Preventive interventions: Keeping children in school and away from abusive work**

Clean up education's act so that it is not part of the problem.

Improve school quality and relevance.

Reach out to working children with special needs.

### **Protective interventions: Helping protect working children against abuse**

Monitor the condition of working children.

Enable children to better protect themselves.

Support children through education for families, employers, and communities.

### **Developmental interventions: Offering children opportunities**

Address what happens to children outside the classroom, including at work.

Create employment opportunities for adults so that children do not have to work.

Establish work alternatives for children who need income. Develop micro-credit schemes or sheltered workshops.

## ESSENTIAL PLANNING PROCESS

Three phases or steps are considered essential to planning: situation analysis, rapid or needs assessment; stakeholder involvement in program planning, implementation, and monitoring; and monitoring and evaluation.

### **The Bangladesh Example: Lessons Learned**

Of the limited experience in using education as a tool specifically intended to eliminate or reduce the worst forms of child labor, the most significant single effort of this type in the world is a Bangladesh project (the Basic Education for Hard to Reach Urban Children Project), which has targeted those in "hazardous" forms of child labor. This project, which is sponsored by the Ministry of Education with UNICEF, supports and serves about 350,000 of the poorest and most underserved urban children. It is intended to pioneer a way to deliver mass education to working children from the poorest families. The Bangladesh experience offers particular insights related to inclusion, school discipline, and instruction.

## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS FOR USAID CONSIDERATION

### *Policy Issues*

1. USAID should critically evaluate its comparative advantage in participating in a holistic approach combating abusive child labor.
2. USAID should assist countries, which have ratified the CRC and/or are considering ratification of ILO Convention 182, to implement changes that will enable the country to fulfill the requirements identified within its plans of action that addresses abusive child labor.



3. USAID needs to decide what definition of “abusive child labor” to adopt. The distinction is in the breadth and specificity of the target group.
  - ◆ The minimum age definition of a child, as described in the ILO Convention No. 138; or
  - ◆ Work by its nature that is harmful to the health, safety, and morals of a child, as defined under Article 3 of the ILO Convention No. 182 and more broadly described under Article 32 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC); or
  - ◆ The most hazardous or insidious forms of child labor—such as child slavery, the trafficking of children, child prostitution, and child soldiers—as identified through a situation analysis or other participatory assessment process.
4. Focus on abusive child labor will ultimately raise other questions that USAID must consider in the development of its priorities:
  - ◆ Should programs exclude children who are not working in hazardous conditions from having access to newly created educational opportunities?
  - ◆ What criteria should be used to qualify children for programs?
  - ◆ If children stop working in order to attend school, does it make them ineligible for programs?
5. USAID should plan program strategies and establish priorities according to the types of child labor that exist in particular areas.
  - ◆ The large majority of children are found working in rural settings, specifically doing agricultural work.
  - ◆ Preventive programs can focus in urban settings where the fastest growing incidence of child labor (e.g., domestic servants, especially girls) is found.
6. Multi-sectoral approaches are needed to compensate for public sector weakness. These should capitalize on civil society approaches and involve all sectors of USAID in planning programs to eradicate the child labor problem.
7. USAID should be aware of the historical context in which programs will be taking place. When planning programs and activities, USAID needs to conduct an overall review of any previous international interventions related to child labor (not necessarily US-funded) and the results of those activities in the overall country environment.
8. USAID programs should recognize the economic incentives for child labor and may want to consider the inclusion of income-generating tools such as micro-credit finance for families and the establishment of links between education and the economy. This consideration, which reflects the human capital development approach advocated by the World Bank, supports the exploration of work-study arrangements, subsidization of school expenses, improved school quality, and expanded health and education services to the poor.
9. In certain situations, USAID may consider utilizing the social responsibility framework as part of a comprehensive, multi-disciplinary program initiative. This framework, which advocates for better connection of children to the protective elements of society, includes reinforcing families, targeting programs specifically to families of working children, and improving basic services (i.e., health, non-formal education, micro-credit, community monitoring of working

places to discover and remedy abuses, organization of children to defend their interests, and political mobilization to make governments more responsible and responsive).

10. A strong emphasis should be placed on increasing the understanding of the impact of abusive child labor to promote greater social concern and solidarity. It is not sufficient to improve education and other government services; societies need to be sensitized to the issue of child labor.
11. USAID may want to consider incorporating a child friendly perspective that puts children's best interests first and that focuses on guaranteeing children's rights, welfare, and overall development. This includes making child labor programs more accountable to the children that they are meant to assist. In this perspective, children are considered agents of their own development and partners in their protection.

### *Programmatic Issues*

12. USAID should consider using the presence and extent of child labor as an important indicator to determine whether its programs of economic development and anti-poverty are reaching and benefiting the poor.
13. USAID may wish to consider exploring ways of developing its own data using its household survey modules related to education and child labor.
14. USAID should consider ways to involve children and their parents both in the planning and evaluation stages of a program in order to ensure program success and sustainability. Recent programmatic experiences are increasingly exploring ways to involve working children themselves (individually and collectively) in implementing measures to alleviate them from exploitative and abusive situations.
15. USAID should consider when developing educational programs that children are often proud of the fact that they can make a contribution to the family, and that the expected benefits of leaving work for schooling must exceed the combined sum of expenses of attending school plus the cost of not working. In order to be more effective, programs should focus on the reasons why children work:
  - ◆ to overcome poverty or as a consequence of emergency situations (such as natural disasters, loss of parental employment, disability of a parent, household crisis),
  - ◆ to cover school expenses,
  - ◆ because there is no alternative available, and
  - ◆ to learn a trade for survival (i.e., school is not the only way to learn).
16. USAID should define measures of success. Differences in perspectives may dictate differing criteria for judging outcomes. In any given context, developers should consider the following types of questions.
  - ◆ Can a program that does not leave children verifiably better off be considered successful?
  - ◆ Is a program that removes children below the established minimum age of fifteen from economic activity and places them in schools better than a program that designs an education program for them that recognizes and accommodates their need to work?

- ◆ Is a program that removes children from abusive work environments but provides an economic alternative as well as the opportunity to obtain an education considered a greater success?
17. USAID should support situation analysis or rapid assessment as and development. USAID should consult key stakeholders (ILO, WB, UNICEF, NGOs, Government, working children, families, employers, local unions, worker's organizations, and community institutions) focused on child labor when conducting a situation analysis or rapid assessment. . Their input will help with the decision-making and implementation process at the programmatic stage. ILO and UNICEF have rapid assessment models currently under development that USAID could incorporate into this process. This is a critical first step to provide programming officers with the following information:
- ◆ Demographic characteristics of working children, their families, and communities.
  - ◆ Purpose of organizations, and conditions and social contexts of children's work (i.e., the most important and most harmful types of work where children are found).
  - ◆ The relationship of children's work to their family and social bonds (i.e., as an economic activity as well as a key instrument to family and community solidarity).
  - ◆ Positive and negative effects of work on children and their families (not only what is dangerous or inappropriate, but also what is beneficial in terms of earnings, self esteem, skills acquisition, etc. ).
  - ◆ Interventions in children's work environments (i.e., workplace monitoring and violence by police).
  - ◆ Availability and quality of education for disadvantaged and working children, as well as discrimination against these children.
  - ◆ Working children's formal and non-formal education participation and achievement vs. children who do not work (i.e., literacy, numeracy, and other skills rather than grades completed).
  - ◆ Child and family perception and evaluation of locally available education. ! Comparative and economic benefits of children in school only versus children involved in work-study programs.
18. USAID may want to consider promoting evaluation and information exchange activities about education projects for children in hazardous work.
19. Educators involved in child labor programs must be adequately trained and sensitized to work with and meet the needs of working children, and especially to integrate children into the classroom environment and not discriminate against them.
20. Decisions need to be made about the curriculum to be taught and its relevance and applicability to children's direct life experiences. For example, literacy classes can take up valuable time that could also be spent on life skills training, which is also of use to children.
21. Programs should be monitored to ensure that teaching and curriculums are appropriate.

## **EDUCATION TO COMBAT ABUSIVE CHILD LABOR AN INTRODUCTORY GUIDE TO POLICY AND PRACTICE**

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### **I. BACKGROUND**

#### **Child Labor in the World Today: Defining the Problem**

Several different definitions of child labor are in common use, and how one describes the situation in the world today depends on which one is followed. For example, the International Labor Organization (ILO) has long defined child labor as economic participation (activities contributing to the Gross Domestic Product under the U. N. System of National Accounts), and as work done in contravention of national child labor laws and international norms. The international norms refer primarily to a universal minimum age of 15 years, with certain exceptions for younger children spelled out in the ILO Minimum Age Convention No. 138, 1973. The child labor problem is, in this view, essentially one of children becoming economically active too young. On the other hand, many other organizations think of it as that work which is harmful to children—age is not really the central issue. There is some indication that this may become the preferred definition in practice. The crux of the child labor problem, in this view, is not that children work, but that they are involved in activities or conditions that put them at serious risk. The U. N. Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 1999 ILO Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention (No. 182) reflect this trend. These important conventions will be addressed later in this paper. These two concepts have quite different policy and practical implications. A profile of the world child labor situation in terms of children working would not resemble one based on children engaged in harmful work or working conditions.

It is important to understand the origins of these definitional problems are of considerable consequence for educators and policy makers. First of all, contemporary social science and historical research has demonstrated that “childhood” is a particularly elusive concept after infancy. Chronological age is only one factor to consider, and in perhaps most of the world may not be as important as personal behavior, social role, the onset of puberty, and other criteria. The concepts of “work” and “labor” are equally slippery. Because of differences in language ideology and other factors, there is no universally accepted standard for defining “child labor.”

In practice, available information reflects the fact that we have much more statistical and qualitative information about children's economic participation than about that work which is harmful to them. While a recent, much cited ILO estimate of 250 million working children may represent as intelligent a guess as can be derived from severely flawed national data, it is still too poorly justified to employ for any serious planning purpose. Most national statistical agencies collect at least some information about children's participation in the labor market, but few produce data narrowed down to those children in detrimental forms of work. This means that if we are specifically interested for policy purposes in that work that is damaging to children—what is often referred to as “abusive child labor”—most available “child labor” data are only obliquely relevant to our interest. Current child labor data describe a different, far larger, and more amorphous pool of children, which does not necessarily include all the children most at risk (e. g., those whose work is not classified as “economic”). Even that information is often of

limited value since official national statistics on working children are in most countries too incomplete and unreliable to be of practical use in policy and program planning. These problems are compounded when aggregated to the international level. The ILO is fully cognizant of these problems and is taking steps to improve national and international child labor statistics. The result of their effort, however, is still some years away. Given that more statistical and qualitative information about children's economic participation exists than about work that is harmful to them, one of the best resources for abusive child labor data may be USAID's own data generated through education and child labor household survey modules.

Even so, simply knowing how many children work does not help policy makers understand which children are at risk. For policy purposes, therefore, it is increasingly accepted that "child labor" should be defined as that work which is detrimental to children. This paper will henceforth follow this definition, and by it will intend the equivalent of what USAID has referred to as "abusive child labor." The terms "detriment" and "abusive" are vague and need to be operationalized for application in particular situations. They refer to harm to children, but there are many different levels and kinds of harm that may be associated with work—even the very definition of harm can, in certain circumstances, be culture-specific. The question is how to arrive at useful criteria when working internationally. One way of doing this is to refer to international conventions, considering as detrimental or abusive those kinds of work and working conditions that their provisions designate as unacceptable. For purposes of this paper, these terms are to be understood according to the criteria set out in Article 3 of ILO Convention No. 182 and in the first paragraph of Article 32 of the CRC. The definitions of the "worst forms of child labor" under Convention No. 182 are a somewhat narrower and more stringent measure of harm to children than is under the CRC. Even the international conventions are very general. For that reason, most expert opinion suggests that specific operationalization of these terms ultimately must be national or even local.

The necessary ambiguity of concepts, such as abusive and detrimental when discussing them in highly general international terms, helps to generate another problem that the reader will encounter throughout this paper—an unclear dividing line between "children's work," understood as all work done by children, and "child labor" understood as just the portion of that work which is harmful to them. This lack of clarity is exacerbated by the fact that some of the most important factors in child labor have to do with why children work in the first place, not only with the fact that they are in unacceptable forms or conditions of work. Unavoidably, the following discussion will sometimes shift back and forth between the broad views of children's work in general, and a narrower view of what USAID refers to as "abusive child labor." An attempt is made to keep the reader clear about the focus at any point in the discussion.

Despite the poor condition of national and international statistics, there is enough evidence to trace the overall distribution of working children in very general orders of magnitude. The vast majority of working children are in the developing countries, and well over half are concentrated in Asia. Globally speaking, children's work is overwhelmingly rural and agricultural. Even though about half the world's population is urban, well over two thirds of working children are rural, and mostly in small farm agriculture. Because the incidence of working children is much higher in rural than in urban areas, child work will remain predominantly rural for a long time to come, even as the world's population is rapidly becoming more urbanized.



Nevertheless, the number of urban working children is growing. It is thought by most experts that, after children working in agriculture, the next largest contingent of working children is that comprised of domestic servants, commonly in households outside their own. If one expands the category of house-help to include substantial home-maintenance and child care tasks that children perform in their own family homes, household work rivals agriculture as the largest category of child work, and the children involved are overwhelmingly girls.

In many countries, rural girls commonly divide their work time between home care and farming tasks, and may, therefore, be considered to inhabit both groups. There also is a large concentration of child workers in the informal sectors<sup>1</sup> of commerce and industry, where children may work either in family undertakings or as waged employees in non-family enterprises. The proportion of child workers involved in formal sector businesses had been reduced, and children involved in the production of export sector products and commodities is generally estimated to be much smaller yet—under eight percent (8%) of all working children. It appears that most economically active children work for or with their family members and, unsurprisingly, receive no monetary compensation. As a proportion of all children who work, those working as wage employees for non-family employers are a distinct minority, but there is a large variation of practice, and in some places children working for non-family employers may be the rule. Nearly everywhere, older children work more than do younger ones.

In regards to gender, if one counts only economic participation as work, there appear to be more boy than girl workers. But the ILO and others suggest that so limiting the definition of child work does a great injustice to girls by not recognizing the heavy home work demands made on them. Most experts feel that if this sort of work is taken into account, the majority of working children are girls.

Also, children are more loosely attached to the labor market than are adults. The large majority of children who work do so only part-time or intermittently. Many work full-time at agricultural peak seasons and very little in between. In some places, it has been found that virtually all children work only part-time, often combining work with school, while in other places children tend either to not work at all (and go to school) or to work full-time (and not attend school).

## The Planning Context

Important developments of recent years strongly influence the social and political environment in which child labor is being addressed, creating both opportunities and limitations for action. The social and political environment needs to be seriously considered in planning how to address the problem. Some of the most important contextual factors at this time are as follows.

### *A Resurgence of International Interest in Child Labor*

There is currently more international interest in child labor and more international debate and mobilization around the subject than at any time since early in the twentieth century. The nature of that interest, however, often differs. Concern in the industrialized “North” has over the last

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<sup>1</sup> Subsequent discussion will occasionally refer to “sectors,” which may variously refer to economic or public policy categories (e.g. the “agricultural sector” or the “education sector”), the organization of economic production or commercialization (e.g. the “formal” and “informal” sectors, the “export sector”), or the division between government and civil society (e.g. the “public sector” or “private sector”). An attempt is made to keep the relative meaning clear each time the term is used.



decade largely centered on the employment of children in the developing country's manufacturing of goods exported to and consumed by the rich countries. The galvanizing issue directly involves only a very small portion of working children, and perhaps an even smaller proportion of those in seriously detrimental work or working conditions. Concern about child labor also tends to be related to other worries about economic globalization, especially as it affects the industrialized countries in question. In the poorer "South," on the other hand, priority attention has been focused on different and far larger groups of working children who either are particularly visible (e. g., street children) or whose work is felt to be hazardous, oppressive, or otherwise objectionable (e. g., maids, brick kiln workers, children in prostitution or working with pesticides, etc.). Poor countries tend to worry more about the children who are the worst off and to connect their problems to broader issues of poverty, social inequality, unemployment, and lack of basic services, especially education facilities. These differences in focus have generated major national and international debate over what should be the purposes, priorities, objectives, and strategies of international action against child labor.

New and old actors in new or expanded roles also are affecting the scene. Until less than ten years ago, the ILO and UNICEF were the only multi-laterals seriously engaged in child labor issues. Even then, the topic was of but secondary interest to both. Today, however, both have large global programs. The ILO operates a large and highly visible action program—the International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labor (IPEC)—in about 40 countries. In about countries, operates a special education program that specifically targets the reduction of child labor. The World Bank has appeared on the scene as a major force, both intellectually and programmatically. Non-governmental organizations have been consolidating some of their efforts. For example, an NGO working group on child labor, the Global March Against Child Labor, was influential in activities recently surrounding the adoption of the recent ILO Convention No. 182 (see Section below). Save the Children has recently strengthened its international federation (the Save the Children Alliance), conducting much of its recent child labor activity through it, and is probably the most significant non-governmental influence on current trends. Working children's own voices are increasingly being brought into international child labor discussion through the NGOs. Academia is far more present than it was only a few years ago, and whereas serious academic attention to child labor was not long ago a rarity, it is difficult today to keep up with the deluge of pertinent new papers and conferences.

This sudden revival of interest and activity in child labor is bringing with it a dramatic expansion of information and ideas, some of which challenge long-standing traditional notions of what child labor is and how to deal with it. Some issues, long assumed to be decided, have been reopened for debate as the conventional wisdom has been undermined by new experience and research findings, and alternative principles that have been proposed are still under discussion. Organizations whose activities and influence are tied to one or another line of thinking have a stake in which ideas prevail. Therefore, debate occasioned by changing perspectives often tends to be heated, and argument sometimes degenerates into acrimony.

As a result, there is a widening gap between technical understanding of child labor and national and international policies to deal with it. The natural time lag between new thinking and its influence on policy is exacerbated somewhat by precarious communication between the people who study and work with child labor on the ground and the politicians and interest group activists who most influence policy at the national and international levels. There is a need to develop better communications channels between all of these groups.

### *A New International Child Labor Convention*

For the last several years, the ILO and other interested organizations have been working to develop a common focus that could be more widely supported by both North and South countries. Those efforts have resulted in a new ILO convention providing for a common priority—children in “the worst forms of child labor.” That convention, the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention No. 182 (1999), attempts to refocus world attention and international cooperation on combating the most abusive forms of child labor, defined as children involved in slavery or slavery-like conditions, in trafficking, in prostitution and other illegal activities, and in seriously hazardous work that threatens their “health, safety, or morals”. Political and public support for this agreement is extremely broad. It is the first convention ever unanimously adopted by the ILO and is now the natural center of gravity for international efforts and cooperation against child labor. It is hoped and expected that ratifications (now at nearly 90) will eventually be as unanimous. All countries ratifying this convention are obligated to prepare national plans of action to identify the child labor activities and conditions to be targeted and to plan for their urgent and rapid eradication. Through assistance from the ILO’s IPEC Office, a number of countries already are well advanced in the preparation of these action plans.

### *A New and Expanding Emphasis on Child Rights*

International discussion about child labor is increasingly expressed in the language of child rights. The rights generally referred to are those articulated in the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which has been ratified by every country except the US and Somalia. It is now the most universally subscribed of all human rights conventions. At this point in time, this Convention is the most powerful and influential international instrument dealing with the treatment of children, and the rights it articulates apply to all policies and programs concerning children, including sectoral ones addressing child labor and education. The Convention’s implementation in national law and action is being energetically promoted by UNICEF (which has the main UN responsibility for assisting implementation of the convention) and a broad group of national and international child defense organizations. In many developing countries, there are active watchdog, advocacy, and training groups promoting proper government and civil society attention to CRC as the master framework for all children’s policy. Many governments have been revising their legal codes in regards to children in order to bring them into compliance with the provisions of the CRC.

Although it is theoretically clear that implementation of Convention No. 182 should observe the principles set out by the CRC, many basic political and operational problems remain to be resolved. ILO Convention No. 182 explicitly recognizes the CRC as an antecedent and was drafted to take its provisions into account. Implementing ILO Convention No. 182 in accordance with the CRC requires in effect that children and their situation be regarded holistically. It also requires that interventions concerning children in any one sector take into account all the rights accorded them under the CRC. In practical terms, this means that action regarding child labor cannot treat it too narrowly, but must deal with various important facets of the issue as well. It must observe not only CRC Article 32, which specifically addresses child work but also a dozen or so additional articles that are plainly relevant. This has raised some interesting questions. Because CRC standards are sometimes incompatible with certain existing national laws or practices concerning child labor and working children, certain underlying tensions between CRC principles and standards set by the 1973 ILO Minimum Age Convention (No. 138) have proved difficult to reconcile completely. In addition, some government labor ministries and civil society labor rights organizations have been uneasy with certain policies advocated by child rights

groups, or by working children themselves, for implementing CRC rights in regards to child labor activities.

There is a particular issue here for the US, which is the only major country not to have ratified the CRC. The question has been raised whether the US should observe this convention in its development assistance programs, particularly those addressing child labor. The practical answer hinges on the fact that, with the sole exception of Somalia, any country that the US could conceivably wish to help is a States Party to the CRC and has assumed obligations under it. Presumably, the US would not wish to encourage recipient countries to disregard or violate the most widely subscribed of all human rights conventions. Also, UNICEF, Canadian and European bilateral assistance programs, and major international NGOs provide technical and financial assistance to many developing countries in bringing their policies and programs in line with CRC compliance. United States assistance that does not take these commitments and relationships into consideration would be of limited use to the host country and could be expected to attract national and international criticism from the child defense community.

### **Planning Context: Recent Important International Developments to Address Child Labor**

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Activity</b>
International Labor Organization	International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labor (IPEC) ILO Convention 182, on the Worst Forms of Child Labor
UNICEF	Special education programs targeting the reduction of child labor, Assistance in implementing ILO Convention No. 182
World Bank	Activities to promote macro and micro economic development and education
Global March Against Child Labor	Activities to encourage adoption of ILO Convention No. 182
Save the Children	Strengthened international federation, more advocacy for child rights
United Nations	Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) 2001 Summit to review the ten years following the 1990 Summit for Children

### *Changing Ideas about Children, Childhood, and Child Development*

Most national and international policy regarding children is based on the idea that all children are roughly the same and everywhere pass through certain biologically determined developmental stages and processes regardless of their culture and social and economic environment. Childhood is seen as a single universal phenomenon simply having many different cultural expressions, which helps justify making international rules for the nurture and protection of children. While important biological bases of childhood are obvious and accepted, recent social science research has revealed that culture plays a more central role than was earlier thought. Also, children tend to develop through different patterns in different environments. For *practical policy purposes in dealing with child labor, it is more useful to think in terms of “many childhoods” than to assume a universal childhood model with many cultural inflections.*

Children are not simply passive recipients of experience. They are active and capable agents of their own development and as able to transact with and change their environment. Children are in fact fairly resilient and resourceful individuals possessing a variety of intelligences that they employ in combination to achieve the many competencies they need to survive and thrive. While there is no question that children can be victimized and require adequate protection, there is nevertheless a trend away from considering them as helpless victims to be buffered by adults against all danger. Thinking tends more toward nuanced concepts that allow for children to learn how to deal with threatening situations and to participate more actively with adults in their own protection. In the case of child labor, for example, there is today much more emphasis on working children's own individual and collective participation in deciding and implementing measures to protect them from exploitation and abuse.

### *Changing Expectations of Government, Civil Society, and the Private Sector*

We live in a time when the appropriate role of government and its capacity is under examination. At the same time, much recent development thought has increased expectations of non-governmental forms of social structure, including the private sector and civil society, and that vague quality of social organization and cohesiveness sometimes referred to as “social capital.” Recent experience and studies in regards to child labor have not been very sanguine about the willingness and capacity of government to deal with the issue according to the conventional models of intervention. The ILO, UNICEF, and NGOs have long called for a multi-sectoral approach that in fact bolsters or compensates for public sector weakness with civil society activities and resources. Recommendations from the World Bank, which is a new international player in child labor, follow in this same vein. The suggestion is not that government be let off the hook from playing a proper role, but that its actions focus on what it can realistically contribute. At the same time, more emphasis is being placed on the role of the private sector, including not-for-profit organizations of many types. There has been particular interest in the question of how community-based and other non-governmental initiatives can be increased in scale and made sustainable.

### *Economic and Education Crises in Developing Countries*

The new international interest in eliminating abusive child labor comes at a time when the poorer countries, where child labor is most concentrated, are particularly ill positioned to deal with it. Many are now experiencing severe economic crises with cuts to basic services, which tend to severely exacerbate child labor problems. Although child labor is not exclusively a product of poverty, children in the poorest countries generally work more than do those in richer

countries, and they are more likely to be engaged in work that is hazardous or otherwise detrimental to them. Most children work to help their families secure a living. As living standards rise, children tend to work less and go to school more. As living standards deteriorate, children tend to work more and attend school less. That does not necessarily mean, however, that work is causing the decline in attendance. The inability to pay school fees is in many places a more important cause.

Recent World Bank, UNDP, and academic reports suggest that economic conditions in many developing countries have deteriorated. People are worse off than they were twenty or thirty years ago and their living standard cannot be expected to improve significantly in the near future. In Sub-Saharan Africa, poverty is almost certain to deepen even further as a consequence of economic and political chaos, armed conflict, HIV/AIDS epidemics, and other factors.

Lack of progress in education is related. The poorer countries did not even approach the Jomtien "Education For All" goals for 2000, and show little sign of doing much better for the new target of 2015. Together these developments suggest that vast populations in rural and urban periphery areas will for the foreseeable future remain unserved or under served by public education facilities, and that large numbers of children will be pushed into the workforce. Current efforts to reduce child labor in much of the world will occur in particularly unfavorable economic and social contexts. Many, including World Bank experts, believe that the surest way to reduce child labor and get children into school would be to increase family income. This could be achieved through both macro and micro-economic measures among the poor and through the provision of a decent basic education available to all children.

### *Concerns about Multi-Lateral and Bi-Lateral Assistance Regarding Child Labor*

International concern about child labor is still largely driven by industrialized countries, which provide most of the financing and political impetus. It comes at a time when the poorest countries are struggling with the social fallout of economic globalization. Many insist that the socially regressive effects of economic globalization seriously exacerbate child labor problems, and that it is inappropriate for the North to condemn the South for problems to which it contributes. Therefore, multi-lateral and bi-lateral initiatives from the North against child labor are viewed by many with widespread skepticism.



## II. POLICY FRAMEWORKS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

Interventions are shaped as much by their conceptual and institutional bases as by their environment. In the case of child labor, there are multiple alternatives for rooting policies and programs. At least several are in common use today and receive substantial institutional and ideological support. One can choose between them or join them in various combinations according to purpose and need. When planning education to combat child labor, the choice of approach is especially important because each has different educational implications.

Child labor is today approached from any of several different perspectives. Each provides not only a general policy framework of internally coherent generative concerns, objectives, target group priorities, strategies and activities, but also a specific view of children, of work, and of the role and process of education. Four of these approaches are particularly prevalent at this time, serving as policy frameworks for various public and private sector organizations across the world. They can be thought of as:

- ◆ a labor market approach,
- ◆ a human capital approach,
- ◆ a social responsibility approach, and
- ◆ a child-centered approach.

Programs devised and operated under these different frameworks often exist side by side in the same place. In Bangladesh, for example, the ILO supports a program removing child workers from the garment industry, under a “labor market” policy approach. A very large non-formal education program bringing primary education to rural children who have to work part-time, a large urban vocational training program, and a World Bank education assistance program reflect a “human resources” policy way of thinking. A group of community-based programs for street children, maids, informal sector workers and other difficult-to-reach working children build on ideas of “social responsibility” philosophy. UNICEF brings a “child-centered” policy framework to a large program it supports for urban children in hazardous work. All of these programs receive funds from bi-lateral donors, who represent differing policy perspectives of their own.

The different perspectives on child labor have, to some degree, been regarded as competitive with one another; and there are enthusiasts for each who claim it is the one best or most legitimate policy approach to child labor. It is increasingly clear, however, that these different perspectives can also complement one another. There is a discernible trend toward pragmatic eclecticism that recognizes the advantages and limitations of each approach and chooses between them, or combines them, according to how usefully they fit the particular situation being addressed. Let us look at these, phrased as “ideal types,” so as to more-cleanly reveal the characteristic thinking of each.



## The Labor Market Framework

This framework, which has been the dominant international policy framework for nearly a century, is based on originally Euro-American cultural ideas of childhood as properly a work-free period. In general, the belief is that work discourages children's development (especially their education) and exposes children to unacceptable risk. This is compounded by anxiety about the potential impact of child workers on adult labor markets and living standards. This view of the world places no small part of the blame for child work on human greed—usually that of employers, but sometimes also of families—and believes that children must be protected against exploitation by adults. This policy concept believes that protection is best achieved by separating children from exposure to the dangers considered inherent in working. "Work" in this case is usually defined officially as economic participation (engagement in any type of economically productive activity), although the image of child work that most drives this perspective is a far narrower and more industrially or commercially oriented one of wage employment outside the family. Factories spring more readily to mind than do family-owned fields and tea shops.

The focus on preventing the economic participation of children below an official minimum age is, in part, also historically rooted in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century fears, beginning in Britain, that child labor would supplant adult workers, saddle society with a combination of adult unemployment and child servitude, obstruct worker organization and deepen working class poverty. This approach vests in government the principal responsibility for child labor action, mandating the State to use its coercive powers to keep children out of the workplace, typically until mid-adolescence. The central strategy for achieving the policy objective of separating children from work is to enlist the coercive power of the State to this end. The importance of the objective of keeping pre-adolescent children from economic participation is reflected in the fact that the internal ILO policy established to guide its IPEC initiatives stipulates that activities making work safe for underage children are acceptable only as an interim measure toward the longer term objective of separating pre-adolescent children from the labor market. A strategy of making work safe is more acceptable for youth above the official minimum age. International standards governing the age at which children may be legally allowed to work are set out in the ILO Minimum Age Convention No. 138, 1973.

As a policy framework, the labor market perspective possesses both strengths and weaknesses. On the positive side, it has a long-established legal and institutional tradition, and through over 150 years of history, it has successfully called much needed attention to the severe abuses that huge numbers of children suffer in their work and galvanized social effort to combat them. It has provided the main policy framework under which today's industrialized countries have reduced, if not eliminated, child labor as a major social problem. Historically speaking, today's industrialized societies are deeply indebted to it for contributing to their social progress. Moreover, it has in place an extensive institutional structure to act on child labor concerns, set up in ministries of labor and politically reinforced by labor unions and other strong civil society organizations dedicated to protecting children against abusive work and working conditions. This includes mobilizing governmental concern and action to protect children against abusive child labor through its various powers. These are extremely valuable social assets.

That said, new thinking and information have tended to challenge the assumptions and beliefs on which this policy framework has been founded. Although it is clear that even minimal amounts abusive work and hazardous working conditions are harmful for children, current social

science research provides little empirical reason to believe that moderate amounts of safe work are inherently harmful for children. To the contrary, light, non-abusive work may provide essential income, stimulate the early acquisition of essential life knowledge and skills, promote resilience, and under the right circumstances may actually enhance school persistence and performance. Similarly, the body of empirical evidence does not support the fear that, as a general rule, the economic participation of children threatens adult employment or wages or perpetuates poverty. Although there certainly are cases where this occurs, the catch is that in many other instances, such as in family farms and businesses, the work of children helps create and stabilize adult employment and income, and there is evidence that the economic contribution of children in many cases forestalls or alleviates family poverty. Moreover, recent analysis suggests that children's attachment to labor markets may be much more volatile and intermittent than that of adults, and that may weaken competition effects. Unfortunately, we still do not even have a decently fleshed-out theory of why children's economic participation might be expected to produce a negative macroeconomic impact—the issue is not nearly as cut-and-dried as one might think. Only now are some economists trying to develop a compelling theory. Nor do we at this time have adequate data by which to rigorously test such a theory if one were available.

Perhaps most importantly of all, it is becoming increasingly clear that the basic causes of child labor lie outside the function of labor markets, usually being embedded in deep economic and social context, including poverty, discrimination, and inequality. This suggests that the most effective strategies for eliminating child labor should attack these causes. It is worth noting that modern economic and social historians attribute the long-term decline of child labor in the West primarily to changes in underlying socioeconomic conditions rather than to the legislation and enforcement of government policies.

Although research and experience have challenged some conventional arguments supporting a labor market policy approach, the model continues to thrive by virtue of its widespread institutionalization. It also has been up-dated by combining it with other approaches. For example, the ILO recommends a “multi-pronged” approach that recognizes the need to link labor market interventions to economic, education, and other reforms necessary to alleviate poverty and other socio-economic pressures generating child labor. Even though current thinking still places primary responsibility on the State and emphasizes the centrality of legislation and enforcement tools, it also recognizes the limitations of government and the need to mobilize other parts of society as well. Still, even this expanded policy framework may prove too narrow to suit the problem.

Historically, the labor market policy model has had crucial implications for education. Few educators fully realize the degree to which it has shaped today's schooling practices and restricted the options for making schools more flexible and efficient. Within the labor market policy framework, education has, in addition to its regular task of providing skills and information to children, the role of keeping them out of the job market until they are old enough to work legally. That is, schools must absorb and occupy all children up to a given age no matter what their progress. This fact influences virtually every aspect of school organization. Children cannot, for example, simply be freed from further school attendance as soon as they successfully master information and skills required to pass a graduation exam, although such a system could in some respects be more efficient and reduce rigid age stratification.

This labor market policy framework tends to regard children's work as inherently incompatible with their education. Although it is on target with its efforts to discourage abusive child labor or hazardous work, it typically also discourages even part-time work as likely to detract from school. It regards children as innocent and helpless against exploitation, and even incapable of recognizing their own best interests. They are considered to be victims or potential victims dependent on protection or rescue by adults. It is also presumed that what is best for adult workers is likely to be best for their children as well. However, child labor cannot be adequately encompassed solely as a labor issue—although it is of course that in part. The problem requires a more comprehensive concept, and the three perspectives to be discussed below suggest some important elements that might be included in a sufficiently broadened policy framework.

## **The Human Capital Framework**

This approach views the work of children through the lens of national economic development. It regards child labor as a product of economic underdevelopment, and suggests that the remedy is to eliminate poverty and its causes. At the macroeconomic level, this entails raising the Gross National Product, and at the microeconomic level, involves providing enhanced income options for the poor. The human capital framework conceives of the child labor problem in terms of work and working conditions that undermine children's eventual contribution as adults to national economic development and their own economic progress. It makes no objection to children's work, per se, but opposes work that stands in the way of children receiving an education. Economists and others working within this framework have produced considerable literature looking at the relationships between children's work, education, and lifetime earnings. The framework focuses considerable attention on family decisions allocating children's time between work and school. It tends to conceive children's work as economically driven and maximizing short and long-term benefits to the household as well as to individual children. Under this approach, policies and activities to develop children's human capital—the skills, attitudes, and other capacities they need to contribute to economic development and become prosperous adults—are promoted. It judges child work according to whether it contributes to or detracts from this objective, opposing work that deprives children of education, for example, but approving of apprenticeships or other work arrangements that transmit skills.

Human capital advocates tend to mistrust a highly intrusive State and to discourage coercive policies such as blanket minimum age prohibitions on work, preferring instead a strategic approach that modifies social behavior through the use of incentives. A recent variant conceives of development as the creation of freedom to choose and the expansion of options from which to choose, especially for the poor. According to this manner of thinking, it would be a step backward to legally prohibit people from undertaking work they feel is necessary to survive, thereby further contracting rather than expanding their already limited options. Instead, human capital advocates recommend policies that increase viable opportunities for children and their families, including the creation of work-study arrangements, subsidization of school expenses for poor children, the improvement of school quality, extension of health and education services to the poor, provision of income-generating tools such as micro-credit, and the establishment of more direct links between education and the skill needs of the economy. In sum, according to this perspective, child labor is seen to be a symptom of underlying economic problems, and the proper way to combat it is to reduce the problems that generate it and create more accessible paths. That is primarily the job of economic development policy and programs, working as much as possible through the private sector. This point of view is especially associated with the World

Bank, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), national ministries of planning and economic development, various employer associations, and many economists and educationalists.

The human capital perspective views childhood as preparation for adulthood, and children in terms of their potential to become economically productive adults. Thus, potential must be protected and nurtured. While it emphasizes the need for literacy and other skills, it also values attitudes, such as initiative and entrepreneurship, which help promote economic growth. The human capital perspective does not engage much in the language of children's rights, but it is adamant that all children should receive a decent education. Although "education" in this context does not always mean formal schooling, human capital advocates have been leading champions of school expansion. They contend that primary and secondary education is the catalytic factor in raising individual and national prosperity in poor countries, and some claim that primary education, especially for girls, yields a higher return on investment than does any other development strategy. After years of inhabiting the margins of child labor debate, this conceptual framework for considering child work is now so prominent that one occasionally hears speculation that developing country governments could replace their reliance on conventional policies based on the labor market perspective with policies representing a human capital approach. Recent intellectual and programmatic initiatives by the World Bank, which addresses child labor from this perspective, could hasten such a shift.

There is no question that the human capital perspective already has made a major contribution to international child labor debate by focusing more positive attention on working children as unrealized potential for economic development. It emphasizes advantages that can be gained by a policy of "investing in children, which is more proactive than merely "protecting" them. Nevertheless, it also has been criticized for certain shortcomings as a unique framework for addressing child labor. Some economists and researchers feel that its faith in education and its claims for the economic return on schooling may be excessive in regards to the poor, who often face discrimination and other barriers that prevent them from making use of education even when they receive it. It is still uncertain whether education expansion more often catalyzes economic growth or follows it.

The claim by economists that education advances social and economic mobility for the poor has been rebutted by some sociologists who claim that school systems, especially in developing countries, are far more likely to act as subtle screening and sorting mechanisms that freeze status quo stratification in place by providing educational advantage to existing elites and channeling school graduates into a class-structured hierarchy of jobs. Experience also suggests that growing national or regional prosperity does not necessarily reduce the number of children working, or even those working in deleterious situations. In fact, in various parts of the world, children of small business or farm owners, and children in more prosperous regions, are more likely to work than are children from poorer families and regions. In general, children work more in situations where they have more opportunity as well as need or desire to work. In the US, for example, well-connected middle-class adolescents are more likely to find jobs than are the children from poorer families. And some educators and child rights advocates raise the important question of whether education and the development of children should be oriented primarily to economic development goals.

Economic incentives have long been used to attract children to school—free lunch programs for students are a classic example—and the World Bank and others have been experimenting with the use of modest cash “scholarships” to encourage attendance by children (especially girls) from poor families. Historians note that the workforce participation of children has declined where the expected economic returns to their education surpass the advantages of full-time work. It also has long been accepted that the creation of job markets that pay a premium for schooling can be more effective than compulsory education laws for keeping children in school. However, where employment opportunity is very limited, such labor market incentives may favor the better-off families, whose children have better access to schooling and who can afford to stay in it longer.

## The Social Responsibility Framework

This perspective regards the work of children in the context of social rather than economic development. It arises out of concern about social inequality, many types of discrimination, unjust concentrations and use of economic and political power, cultural alienation, dysfunctional family and community relationships, social irresponsibility, and the deterioration of values and moral fiber. The central concern is with the “exclusion” of disadvantaged groups from full participation in the protection, benefits, and opportunities of society. The proposed remedy is greater social inclusion of those being excluded or marginalized. The child labor problem is, in this context, defined primarily as work that exploits, alienates, or oppresses children and separates them from society’s normal protections. Such exclusion is seen to result from inadequate social compassion and responsibility, as typically witnessed in government neglect of the poor, the repressive selfishness of elites, the lack of solidarity among the poor and working classes, and the breakdown of supportive family structure and obligations. Children also can be trapped in abusive work by the inflexibility of traditional societies unable to evolve in response to changing times, conditions, and technology. *Child labor is understood to be a situation in which children are neglected and left vulnerable to greed and exploitation because they are not properly connected to society, especially their families and communities.*

As in the case of the human capital policy framework, the mere fact that children work is not necessarily considered a problem, although it is believed that children should engage only in “safe work”—work that is acceptable to the child, family, and society. According to the social responsibility perspective, eliminating abusive child labor lies not so much in reducing poverty or removing children from the work force as much as in better connecting them to the protective elements of society. This “protective mobilization” of society is typically promoted through the reinforcement of families, targeted programs for working children and their families, improved basic services (such as health, non-formal education, and microcredit), community monitoring of workplaces to discover and remedy abuses, organization of children to defend their own interests, and political mobilization to make government more responsive or responsible. It is especially interesting to note that, in various parts of the world, interventions based on this model have tended to emphasize “grassroots” initiatives and democratic procedures and the participation of children, not only in their own protection, but also in the advancement of their community and society. Many governments have found such local mobilization to be helpful and have actually encouraged it with financial and other forms of support.



This approach emphasizes the strategic importance of changing cultural values in order to promote greater social concern for and solidarity with excluded groups, in this case children in abusive work. Groups espousing a social responsibility view of development have in some countries generated elaborate critiques of the situation of children living in poverty, and working and street children have been among those most in focus. Such groups regard children as both a social product and a social project; the development of children is ultimately dependent on the moral development of their society, and a moral society would care for all its children. Social science research has long demonstrated that trust, networks, and various forms of exchange and interchange within a child's family, school, peer group, and larger community have wide-ranging effects on children's opportunities and choices and, therefore on their behavior and development. At-risk children are thought best nurtured and protected by broadening social responsibility for, and solidarity with, them. This line of thinking supports the notion of child rights. It tends to judge society in terms of how well it meets its obligations to address children's basic needs and incorporate these children into economic, political, and cultural life as fully enfranchised citizens.

This highly social and cultural view of society and children's place in it has spawned some of the most innovative non-formal education programs that reach working children. Most famous is the so-called "street-education," in which specially recruited and trained "street educators" aggressively reach out to children in streets and other workplaces in order to link them to networks of personal concern and social support. Developed systematically in Latin America during the 1970s and 1980s, from whence it spread all over the world, street education has become the standard procedure for reaching various kinds of working children, such as those in street-trading, prostitution, begging, and petty services. This proactive outreach to such children has been found necessary to eventually attract them away from risky work situations and into regular or non-formal schooling. Other successful education innovations have included programs mobilizing and educating working children to undertake their own initiatives, community-run schools and projects, work-study arrangements that incorporate work as a form of learning, and various forms of citizenship education.

A great contribution of the social responsibility perspective has been to demonstrate the importance of mobilizing a whole society to attack the workplace abuse of children and to call attention to the critical role of social values as a determinant of children's welfare. It has convincingly made the point that child labor problems cannot be finally solved merely through "technological fixes" such as improving education and other government services, as undeniably important as those measures may be. Child labor has a collective moral dimension that must also be taken into consideration, and groups working from this perspective have in some cases dramatically sensitized the broader society and led it to take substantive measures on children's behalf.

But there are problems with the approach. Its argument for the primacy of values and social processes does not always agree with evidence from economists that economic variables sometimes explain more than social ones. Research trying to link child labor to family structure and dynamics has produced ambiguous results. From the more practical side, it is not always clear what practical interventions can be successful against major problems such as the entrenchment of elites and discrimination against the poor, claimed by the critique to generate child labor. It can appear that one has to change the world to change anything at all, and the numerous small, community-level programs this ideology sparks through its call for broad social engagement are at some level inconsistent with its sweeping diagnosis of the root problems.



## The Child-centered Framework

The child-centered framework, the newest of the policy frameworks, has been brought to the fore by the adoption and nearly universal ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). It has become the accepted international standard for child policy, a fact not always appreciated in the US, which is the only country (except Somalia) not to have ratified CRC. Unlike the other conceptual frameworks, child-centered interventions in child work focus on children as their primary clientele, giving their interests and welfare first priority without filtering them through prior adult agendas. Unsurprisingly, this perspective is most associated with organizations for the defense of children. It is prominently represented at the international level by UNICEF and international child rights organizations and at the national level by a growing number of non-governmental and community organizations promoting children's rights and welfare. It is driven by concern about conditions that impair children's growth and violate their rights. Accordingly, it conceives of child labor as that work which undermines children's well being and individual and social development, and it judges the appropriateness of any work according to its effect on a child. Work is broadly defined to include much more than economic participation. For instance, girls working in their homes are included in the focus. The purpose of intervention in children's work is to guarantee their rights, welfare, and development.

The CRC presents a compendium of diverse rights described in nearly forty articles. One of them (Article 32) deals with child work, and its main clause guarantees children the right to be protected against work that exploits them or is detrimental to their health and physical and psychosocial development. The Convention is intended to promote a holistic view of children, and therefore its other articles have to be taken into consideration as well. One of the CRC's most fundamental provisions (Article 3) requires that "in all actions concerning children . . . the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration. " This principle is at the very heart of the child-centered perspective. At least another dozen or so rights articulated by the CRC are relevant to child labor concerns<sup>2</sup>. In addition, the new convention of the ILO (No. 182) against the worst forms of child labor is written in such a way that it, too, can be seen to express a right of children to be protected from dangerous work situations.

The child-centered perspective makes the shift from rights to action by focusing on child development rather than child rescue objectives. Even short-term assistance intends in this context to serve a longer-term child welfare and development purpose. One also notices, among programs following this perspective, a marked sense of moral accountability to the children involved. An action that does not leave children better off is not considered a success even if it achieves its other goals. It has been noted that child-centered programs and activities tend to be characterized by at least three elements that can be considered its essential strategies:

- ◆ Action is based on a solid understanding of children, including their development, and the particulars of their situation. Usually this entails careful field research or assessment as an initial step, and activities are targeted and planned largely on the basis of this information.

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<sup>2</sup> They include: the right to not be discriminated against (Article 2); the right of children to have their voice and opinion heard in all official actions concerning them (Article 12); the right to freedom of association (Article 15); the right to freedom from violence and abuse (Article 19); the right to an adequate standard of living (Article 27); the right to free and relevant schooling that effectively develops a child's potential (Articles 28 and 29); and the right to rest and play (Article 31), among others.

- ◆ The operational focus is on the best interests of the children involved, and action is planned and evaluated according to that criterion.
- ◆ Working children participate in defining and addressing child labor problems, and may even themselves assume the initiative.

*The child-centered perspective is especially influenced by current ideas of human rights and human development.* It understands children to be resilient as well as vulnerable, to be capable as well as inexperienced, to be characterized by knowledge as well as ignorance, to have a variety of intelligences as well as learning needs, and to be active rather than passive agents in their development. It also appreciates that children learn best through personal engagement in life activities, and that crucial self-esteem comes in part from a sense of efficacy in the world. This view contrasts with perspectives that represent children more passively as present or potential victims, as blank slates to be written on by schools and other institutions, or as mere products and expressions of their culture. For this reason, a child-centered approach emphasizes children's participation in making decisions about their work and activities for their protection, as mandated in Article 12 of the CRC. The CRC provides for children to be heard and to have input into decisions concerning them, but not right of sole decision. The CRC's intent is to ensure that children's views be considered, and not to take away the decision-making authority or responsibility of the parents and constituted authorities.

The major contribution of the child-centered perspective has been to refocus primary attention on children and their welfare. It has in effect made child labor action more accountable to children. This is a needed corrective to many current child labor prescriptions. Assertive introjections of the child-centered perspective into international debate already has turned the "best interests" provision of the CRC into a central criterion that all parties in the discussion must address. In various countries there is a perceptible shift toward child-centered approaches to dealing with child labor. In the Philippines, for example, community mobilization around the CRC has played a key role in identifying, monitoring and assisting working children at risk. Children's own organizations and initiatives have been encouraged in places as different as India, Senegal and Peru. Most strikingly, working children also have begun to participate in national and international policy deliberations in regards to child labor. In some places, they also have input into the planning of their education.

As with the other three perspectives, however, there are problems as well as advantages. Most centrally, some disagree with a main tenet of the CRC, the Article 3 provision that children's best interests be "a primary consideration" in "all actions concerning children." They feel child labor policy should above all protect the employment and income of working adults, upon whom children are dependent for their support. Another key area of debate regarding the child-centered perspective focuses on whether children are able to actually—in all cases—determine accurately their long-term best interest. While some children may have a level of maturity to do so, there may be other driving factors that influence a child's choice that may not protect their health, safety or morals and their long-term future. Some critics believe that children should not have a choice to determine the extent of their work or school involvement because they may not have the maturity to make sound choices in their own best interest for the future. Also, although its intellectual and organizational influence seems to be growing rapidly in academia and NGOs, the child-centered perspective remains relatively marginalized in official national policy and programs guiding child labor action. This is due in part to lack of organizational means for introducing this new perspective into action. In addition, however, application of the CRC to

child labor presents some sticky implementation issues. It is not always clear how to turn its rights language into practical action, or how to efficiently sort through a dozen or so CRC provisions that might pertain to a particular child labor situation. Ministries are organized to take responsibilities for sectors, but implementation of CRC rights often implies cross-sectoral decision-making, which is cumbersome and difficult. Also, the best interests standard can pit adult against child interests, and while this may be an accurate reflection of the issues, the political and community relations problems raised may be unresolvable in practice. One of the most common criticisms of the CRC is that simplistic implementation of it may tend to focus so much attention on direct services to the child that it neglects to pay sufficient attention to the broader social and economic context that affects children powerfully even if indirectly. For that reason, UNICEF and other agencies have been stressing the importance of making broader economic and social policies more “child-friendly. ”

### III. RELATION BETWEEN CHILD WORK AND EDUCATION

Studies of the relationship between children's work and schooling have long tended to find a negative general relationship between children's work and their school enrollment, attendance, perseverance, progress, and/or performance. The more children work, the less likely they are to be in school, to progress through its grades, or to perform well in the classroom or on tests. However, there are so many exceptions to this central tendency (perhaps a third of cases), that it cannot be applied as a "rule of thumb." The relationship also appears to be curvilinear. Various studies find that children working very limited amounts of time have higher levels of school participation and performance than either those who work more or those who do not work at all. Such anomalies suggest the prudence of independently determining the relationship between children's work and their education for each country or situation. Moreover, even where a relationship is confirmed by the data, the interpretation of what it means in practice is likely to be difficult, and the issue of what is cause and what is effect may be impossible to resolve. Non-specialists tend to presume that a negative relationship between schooling and work means that children's work involvement causes them to do worse in school, which of course reflects popular preconceptions and is certainly true in many situations. Specialists, however, are aware that other explanations may be at least equally valid. There is some indication (from different kinds of studies) that, for example, children doing poorly in school are more likely to take on, or be given, greater work responsibilities as a result.

Also, both work and low school participation/performance may be effects of a common underlying cause, such as poverty. For instance, children from poor families almost everywhere tend to frequent and perform in school at a lower level than do children from better-off homes. Socio-economic status is a powerful predictor of school persistence and performance. Since working children in developing countries are predominantly from poor households, poverty alone might be expected to produce school participation and achievement differences between working and non-working children. In order to determine how work is actually related to school involvement and performance it is necessary to eliminate the poverty explanation by comparing the schooling participation and achievement of working and non-working children from the same background. But that is hard to do, for relatively few of the data sets now being analyzed provide convincing indicators that can be used to control for poverty.

Indeed, measuring poverty presents a thorny methodological problem in its own right. It can be equally difficult to exclude the influence of other potentially significant explanatory factors, such as subtle discrimination or individual differences in ability and aspiration. Therefore, merely confirming that work is statistically associated with low school participation and performance is not particularly useful for developing policy or programs. For that purpose, insight into why the relationship exists, the complexity of its dynamics, and how and where one might productively intervene is still best provided through special field studies utilizing ethnographic and other qualitative methods.

Despite such complexities in the relationships between school and work, policy makers and educators conventionally think of the two as tending to be mutually exclusive. They assume that work beyond simple home chores is likely to be harmful for children, or that it at least detracts from schooling, and that school is uniformly good for them. This highly simplistic model underlies much or most existing policy. Our earlier explanation of the reasons children work should signal a warning about the limitations of this view. At the other extreme, there are some who consider work to be intrinsically developmental, something all children ideally should do at

least part time, and school (as typically constituted) as a marginally useful activity that also stifles children's initiative, imagination and intellect. Both these positions have their grain of truth, but also their distortions and a highly polemical either-or quality that is not very helpful for dealing with the real world. Accordingly, social scientists, educators and children's advocates today increasingly reject any either-or model that categorically sets education against work in favor of one that places both work and school on a continuum of their effects on children, ranging from beneficial at one pole to detrimental at the other. Most actual schools and child work situations would fall somewhere between the two extremes, either because their effect is neutral or, more typically, because the effects on children are actually a mixture of benefits and detriments, in which case it is necessary to judge which predominates.

### Comparing Beneficial and Detrimental Effects of School and Work on Children

SCHOOL		
Beneficial	Mixed	Detrimental
↑	↑	↑
Questionable Comparison	More Appropriate Comparison	Questionable Comparison
↓	↓	↓
Detrimental	Mixed	Beneficial
WORK		
In extreme discourses, the benefits of school are contrasted with the detriments of work, or the benefits of work with the detriments of school. These are questionable comparisons. In fact, both school and work tend to mix benefits and detriments to children, and they should be assessed accordingly. Interventions should increase the benefits and reduce the detriments of each.		

This more sophisticated model, or variations of it, fits the findings of modern research much better than does the old dualistic concept. It is particularly useful for practitioners because it helps them to see both work and school in a nuanced perspective that can be worked with. It encourages realistic policies and programs that recognize both work and education typically have simultaneous advantages and disadvantages for children, and it discourages wild rhetorical claims comparing best of school with the worst of work, or the best of work with the worst of school. It is far more productive to analyze what developmental experience (both negative and positive) children get from both their work and their school, and then to adjust each with the other as possible so as to maximize the overall benefit to children while reducing detrimental effects to a minimum. In some cases this approach leads to moving children out of work and into full-time school as a substitute activity. In others, it leads to establishing arrangements, sometimes very innovative ones, which permit or even encourage children to successfully combine non-hazardous work and school. Programs providing for children and adolescents to both work and study are highly varied and are to be found in both developing and industrialized countries.

## Why Children Work: Primary Motivations

Successful efforts to educate working children must take into account the reasons why they work. Otherwise, services will not reach them, or will not have the desired impact. Among the many reasons children work, four—which now tend to be neglected by education—are especially important for educators to take into consideration. Children work:

- ◆ *to ward off the worst consequences of poverty.* In developing countries, most working children come from poor families and communities. In rich countries, the situation tends to be reversed, with most working children coming from the better-off classes, but these relatively well-off youngsters account for but a small fraction of all working children in the world. Work during at least a significant part of most days is for many children worldwide so essential to family survival that it cannot be suspended in favor of education. This elemental fact suggests that education must recognize and deal with the poverty factor, leaving space for children to work as well as study.
- ◆ *to defray the expenses necessary to attend school.* In these cases, school systems are in effect being partially subsidized by the earnings of children. This suggests easing the economic burden of schooling on at least the poorest families.
- ◆ *because schooling is unavailable or because the school that is available is unattractive or unproductive.* Reaching these children entails making education accessible and palatable. A
- ◆ *to learn as part of their practical training to survive and succeed in life.* This implies that schooling is not the only educational activity useful for children. Educators should plan educational activities within the broader context of children's multiple learning needs and the sources that provide for them.

These four motives underlying much child work suggest a relationship between education and work that is far more complex than many educators and policy makers appreciate and thus challenge education systems to respond in unaccustomed ways. For that reason, we will explore them one by one, presenting the issues and a discussion of what those issues imply for education policy and programs attempting to reduce child labor and to provide working children a meaningful education.

### *Motive 1: Children work to alleviate the effects of poverty.*

Children very commonly contribute from roughly a fifth to a third or more of the cash or in-kind income of poor households, and in some households considerably more. Economic and other research confirms that, especially in poor countries, their work helps to maintain a certain minimal level of household consumption, to provide a buffer against loss of income from other sources, or to release adults (mostly women) to enter the job market. Developing country surveys consistently show that most working children make their economic contribution willingly, despite being a matter of necessity, and often express pride in their ability to help their family.

Much child work is only episodic or temporary, occurring seasonally as part of agricultural or other natural cycles, or as a response to household misfortunes and emergencies such as sudden loss, disability or unemployment of a parent. Even when child work cannot be considered essential to the family's survival, it often does much to alleviate the worst pain of



poverty, which is not to be taken lightly. This widespread reliance on children's work is unlikely to change soon, because of what the World Bank calls "stalled progress" in the economic development of most developing countries. In about 100 countries the poor are economically no better off today than they were thirty years ago, and in many of them people are actually becoming poorer. Although some measures—such as forgiving part of the national debt of poor countries—are now being taken to address this regressive situation, poverty in the majority of the world's countries will, even in the best of conditions, take many years even in the best of circumstances to reduce poverty to a minimally acceptable level. Moreover, even when the currently lagging economies do at last improve, experience suggests that the poor will be among the last to benefit. For the foreseeable future, then, the work of children will continue to be an essential element in the survival strategies of the poor. Educators need to take that reality into account when considering the future availability of children for school. Many children they must reach simply will not be able to make school their only, or even primary, responsibility unless severe family income pressures can be alleviated.

To poor families, the economic opportunity costs of children not working, along with out-of-pocket school expenses, can be so high as to discourage investment in school-based education. As economists point out, it is not economically rational for children to give up work to study unless the expected benefits of schooling exceed the combined sum of expenses of attending school plus the opportunity costs of not working. In schools where learning does not take place, or where job markets are too saturated to reward education with enhanced employment or income opportunities, the economic benefits of schooling may fail to exceed its costs to children and their families. Educators and child labor activists too often miss this crucial point. Economic sacrifice also may be justified on non-economic grounds, such as improved social status, the joy of reading, or expanded access to information that can result from school completion. Interviews with children often turn up non-economic reasons for wanting an education. Nevertheless, people living in poverty tend to judge the payoff from schooling largely in terms of the expanded employment and income opportunity it opens. There are limits to how much they will sacrifice for education that does not lead to economic benefits.

Thus education policy makers and administrators wishing to attract children of the poor into the education system need to consider what children and their parents will accept as reasonable return on the direct and indirect costs of attending school. They need to better understand how children and parents make decisions when they must choose between work and school, and try to accommodate their needs. For example, when it is possible for children to both work and study, families are not forced to decide whether school will produce more economic benefits than work, a harsh test that many schools serving the poor in rural areas or urban slums perhaps could not pass. It is widely recognized that education in most places could be made much more effective in setting children of the poor on the path to greater social and economic opportunity. Many educators, however, are hostile to the notion that they should be at least partially accountable for the social and economic impact of the education they provide. Major progress toward making education more productive for children from poor families may ultimately depend on changing educators' attitudes about the social purposes of education and their responsibility for meeting those purposes.

*Motive 2: Children work in order to attend school.*

Many children work in order to pay the expenses of attending school. Their earnings may contribute toward either their own schooling or that of siblings. Many children take responsibility for earning all or part of their own education expenses. When family resources are not adequate to meet the expenses of educating all the children, some children may have to give up school for work in order to make it possible for siblings to attend. This need to choose who will and will not be educated often perpetuates discrimination. Girls in many places are expected to abandon school for work if necessary to pay for educating their brothers. Older children commonly sacrifice their own education in order to finance the education of younger ones. Educators and policy makers need to realize the extent to which work makes school possible for some children. In most developing regions, surveys of working children report school expenses as one important motive for working. This implies that national education systems are being indirectly subsidized by children's economic contributions, but little or no attempt has been made to calculate the extent to which national school attendance by poor children depends on their working.

Article 28 of the CRC requires ratifying governments to provide free and compulsory basic education to all children. Few developing countries meet this obligation, including most of those having free public education policies. In the poor countries today, “free” primary and secondary education is rarely free, except in name. Government typically provides only tuition and building facilities (and often not the latter) free of cost to the poor, expecting students or their families to pay all other expenses. In order to be admitted to school, students must purchase all required books, consumable supplies (e.g., notebooks and pencils), and school uniforms. Transportation to and from school may be an additional expense. In many places, students also must pay fees to take examinations or to engage in other activities inherent in the educational process.

International agencies concerned with the financial health of developing countries (e.g., the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund) long discouraged truly free education that would cover all student out-of-pocket expenses. Instead, they promoted the idea that education costs should be shared between government and “user” families. This position is based on the idea that education brings private economic benefits to students and their families, and that it is therefore fair that the beneficiaries help pay the costs. Many have pointed out that this contravenes national obligations under CRC Article 28. In the last few years, the adverse consequences of so regressive a policy on the poor—including sizeable increases in child labor—have become increasingly apparent, and some international organizations and national finance and planning ministries have now begun to back away from it. Means-tested subsidies to the poor are now being piloted in places as different as Brazil and Bangladesh, but it is not yet clear whether such selective assistance policies are sustainable in the long term, nor are all countries interested in them.

In many places, the idea of completely free and democratized education, as it is known still, is not accepted by national policy makers. In China, for example, the central government ceased about ten years ago to provide the major funding for primary education, making it a local responsibility. Since then, school fees have grown to the point that education is increasingly a luxury item in China's poorest villages, purchased only when family finances allow—and far more often for boys than for girls. Under this system, school enrollments have expanded in urban and richer sections of the country while in many poor rural areas only a minority of school-age children is in school. In many countries, ruling elites oppose the idea of educating

children of the poor to a level “above their station,” particularly in rural areas, and resist the principle of equal educational opportunity. In some cases, this bias reflects social traditions such as caste, and in other instances, policy makers worry about the negative consequences of raising through education social advancement expectations that the economic and political systems cannot meet. They fear the social impact of growing ranks of “overeducated” young people for which the country cannot generate nearly enough suitable jobs. While this may be a legitimate concern, ensuing restrictions on educational opportunity usually fall disproportionately on the poor.

Corruption is also a significant expense factor complicating the educational access of working children and forcing many to work in order to stay in school. This problem has not received much publicity, nor has it been adequately studied. It has long been a familiar obstacle to children and families, however, who must bear its cost and to conscientious school administrators and teachers whose devoted efforts to improve education it thwarts and undermines. While it is by no means everywhere, dishonesty in national school systems is far more common and out of control than officials readily admit, and it is more important in generating child labor and keeping the poor from school than they realize. As many long-time advisors to developing country education programs recognize but cannot say publicly, bribery, theft, and misappropriation of public funds are rampant in many education ministries, and their bureaucracies and schools often are stuffed with unqualified political appointees who may not be expected even to turn up for work. In more than a few countries, the problem is so extensive that the school system is popularly regarded as one of the government institutions most permeated by petty corruption.

Surveys of working children have long reported one or another form of corruption as an important factor in their working or dropping out of school. In many places, children or their families must pay substantial bribes or other extra-legal costs in order to complete even a primary education. In some countries, for instance, it is a common practice for schoolteachers to withhold from their regular class essential material children must master in order to pass their year-end examinations. The missing information, or assistance in understanding it, is provided in private “tutoring” sessions that the teacher offers outside school hours and for which students must pay. Children who cannot pay to receive this supplemental instruction are far less likely to pass their examinations and be promoted. In other places, children may take the examinations for free, but receipt of a passing grade depends upon gratuities to the teacher. Children regularly report such “extra” expenses among those they must earn money in order to pay, and some complain that teachers charge higher prices to children they want to dissuade from attending school, notably including working children. The discriminatory expenses added by education system corruption, may in some places, help explain why children of the poor in general, and working children in particular, typically perform in class less well than do children from better-off groups.

Misappropriation of money, time, and materials can be a particular problem in decentralized bureaucracies unable to properly supervise their far-flung reaches, and education systems are among the most decentralized of all. Many children or their families must assume extra school expenses or put up with inferior facilities because government funds or materials have inexplicably “disappeared” somewhere between the national ministry and the local school, which of course makes school less accessible and attractive to poor children. As important as is financial malfeasance, teacher theft of time by not showing up to teach seems to be more widely deleterious to working children. Throughout the developing regions, working children from rural

areas and urban slums consistently identify chronic teacher absenteeism as one of the discouraging factors that lead them to give up school.

Evidence suggests the problem is much worse than is commonly realized. For example, a recent university-assisted study of education system efficiency in a Latin American country discovered that on any given school day, as many as half the nation's primary school teachers might be absent from their posts. This absenteeism, which was largely concentrated in rural areas and urban shantytowns, suggests that in many schools serving working children the teachers are absent more often than present. Ironically, in this particular country, the problem cannot be attributed to poor teacher pay, the most common excuse for teacher neglect of their duties, for teachers there receive above-average salaries for their area and education level. Even where teacher attendance records are kept, they may be easily falsified and absences grossly understated. Unauthorized teacher absences and other petty corruption in the system is in many places so entrenched that it has acquired the status and acceptance of custom—which makes it more difficult to eradicate.

This situation suggests that many children are working in order to pay the costs of chronic education system under-funding, neglect, and corruption. Bad fiscal and personnel management of education services generates child labor and makes it more difficult to educate children who work. This is a grievous situation that deserves to be taken seriously by policy makers, educators, and children's advocates. It is clear that governments need to make the investments necessary to honor their education obligations under the CRC, and follow up on those investments to ensure reasonable efficiency and honesty. Children should not have to work in order to make up for government malfeasance.

*Motive 3: Children work as a productive alternative when schools are unavailable or inferior.*

Another important reason many children work instead of study is the absence of a decent educational alternative. This important fact belies the common rhetoric and expectation that children prohibited from working will go to school instead. For example, when many thousands of children working in the Bangladesh garment industry were suddenly dismissed in 1993 in reaction to foreign pressure, very few returned to school. Most simply gravitated to employment having worse working conditions and lower pay than did the clothing factories. Merely eliminating their jobs did not abolish the barriers that had excluded them from school in the first place. Often children either do not have access to a school, especially after the first few grades, or they have stopped attending out of discouragement with the poor quality of education offered. These two problems are so common that, in many places, more children work because they are out of school than leave school in order to work.

In many rural areas, no more than the first few years of school are locally available, if that, and even children wanting further education have no choice but to go to work unless they can move elsewhere to study. School quality problems are especially powerful causes of school abandonment. In the words of one study: "Research findings for the seven main cities of Colombia, based on the opinions of working children themselves, establish that the severe limitations of school constitute the main cause for dropping out; only two per cent of the children mentioned work as the reason." (Salazar 1998). Likewise, a study by the American University in Cairo found school abandonment in Egypt to result primarily from dissatisfaction with school

quality rather than from poverty or the need to work (extract from an unpublished 1998 report, provided by UNICEF Cairo).

Almost everywhere poor people have worse schools than do better-off people. This is one of the most important effects of poverty on education, and it is true in much of the North as well as in the South. While decrepit facilities and antiquated instructional methods can be a system-wide problem, schools in poor areas often are so much worse that children attending them learn almost nothing useful. In many places—perhaps even in the majority of developing countries—many or most poor children who start school never become functionally literate, even if they complete the primary education cycle. In Latin America, which is the richest developing region, it has been estimated that only about half of all children completing the primary school cycle actually achieve sustainable literacy, and many children drop out before completion. Worse, the proportion of illiterates may climb to over three quarters for children from the poorest half of the income distribution, which includes the vast majority of working children.

Problems of access to school are gradually diminishing as more school spaces become available, but in many rural and urban periphery areas they are still the main barriers to universal schooling. Some of the poorer countries struggle just to keep up with population expansion, and have not made much progress in reducing the space deficit. The need here is to provide infrastructure, and in many underserved places government provision is so far behind the need that local communities or non-governmental organizations have established basic school facilities. On the whole, however, problems of school quality are increasingly the dominant issue. There are two main “education quality” problems, both of which obstruct children’s learning and encourage children to abandon school and go to work: inferior instruction and violence. Let us consider each in turn.

*Inferior Instruction.* The primary cycle, which usually is at least four years in length, is considered to be the amount of time it should take children to learn to read and write. The fact that so few children from poor communities achieve this not very ambitious goal speaks volumes about the inferior quality of education provided them. Educators often argue that schools find it more difficult to educate children from poor and less educated families, which is known to be true. But it is equally true that school systems are often slow to make curriculum and process changes required to accommodate the learning needs and characteristics of these students, even when they are in the majority. While there is solid evidence that living in a family environment of illiteracy and poverty tends to retard education progress, experience also suggests that schools can do much to overcome this negative effect. Early childhood education, for example, has proven to be such a powerful compensatory tool that UNICEF now makes it a top program priority of its support to education. The problem is that many schools do not adjust their activities to serve the specific needs of the poor, but blame working children (and their relatively uneducated parents) for not adapting well to school routines that do not fit into schedules and life-styles necessitated by poverty. Many reformers question why educators expect all children to adapt to middle-class school values and models when it would be more logical to expect schools to adapt to the social environment they are serving. All over the world, the main problem is not so much that children cannot learn as that schools do not teach, or even provide an environment suitable for learning. The message to educators is that they could substantially reduce the number of out-of-school working children simply by ensuring that the poor have access to schooling of decent quality.



*Physical and Psychological Violence.* Surveys of out-of-school working children have long turned up significant numbers of children who abandoned their studies because they refused any longer to put up with beatings, humiliation, and other forms of violence from teachers or peers. Ironically, the mental and physical abuse of students is in some places considered appropriate didactic methodology. In many countries it is accepted and common educational procedure to beat children—often with a stick or other instrument—not only for infractions of discipline, but also when they answer a teacher wrongly, or even hesitate to reply. Many parents who were brought up in such punitive systems believe their children are not being seriously educated unless they are beaten regularly. Abuses are particularly prevalent in schools serving rural areas and slum communities—precisely where working children are most concentrated.

There is some evidence that working children are disproportionately singled out for discrimination, constant humiliation, and sometimes even physical violence at the hands of teachers and other students. Such abuse is selectively meted out to certain children considered undesirable, in the hope that they will drop out of school. Where caste, class, or occupational discrimination is prevalent in adult society the problem of discrimination against certain working children seems particularly widespread. It is common for children in occupations that leave them especially ragged or dirty—garbage scavengers are a notable example—to be ostracized by both teachers and students until they give up and leave school. Many working children, especially those working autonomously in street trades, are more independent and outspoken than are their peers, and are likely to be dismissed as discipline problems or bad examples for other children if they do not take care to be properly submissive. Almost everywhere children engaged in prostitution are discouraged from attending school, partly because of teacher and peer discrimination and partly due to pressure from parents of other children who regard sex workers as moral contaminants or a subclass undeserving of education.

While many attempt to reduce mental and physical abuse in the classroom by properly training teachers in modern education precepts, the problem remains distressingly prevalent in many areas. Even some programs established specifically to create a welcoming environment for working children have found it difficult to root out maltreatment of students, despite training teachers not to depend on punitive measures. This suggests that far more energetic measures than simple training may be required to effect changes in classroom culture where violence against children has been incorporated into traditional classroom processes.

The limited accessibility and inferior quality of schooling available to poor children may not change substantially in the foreseeable future. But this grim future is not inevitable. We know how to improve schools so that they can attract, retain, and effectively educate virtually all children of the poor. With a proper sense of national priorities and political will, we can learn from and build upon an already existing body of successful experience. The school participation of working children can be expected to rise along with any significant general improvement in educational infrastructure, content, and methods. Even as generalized improvements in education facilities for the poor are accomplished, however, there still will be a need for educators to address the special discrimination against at least certain groups of working children. The challenge is not only to avoid discrimination, but also to facilitate working children's participation in education by reaching out to them.



*Motive 4: Children work to learn.*

Work as a source of learning is far more common than many educators and policy makers seem to realize. Its enormous social and economic significance is often overlooked in current debates about education and child work. Legitimate worries about child labor abuses and justified concern to universalize education have in recent years focused attention so exclusively on negative aspects of children's work that its critical socializing and training role has been largely forgotten. Most societies have work-exchange, apprenticeship, or employment mechanisms through which children learn fundamental life skills and attitudes by participating with adults in work. For nearly a century, anthropologists and sociologists have considered these activities as important as school in preparing children for successful adulthood. Especially in developing countries, work rivals school as a formative influence on children and as an indispensable educational medium for society. This fact has not been much considered in education policy. In most countries, work remains to this day the main vehicle by which young persons acquire the majority of skills necessary to make a living and raise a family. In most societies, children commonly learn a trade either by working with their family or through employment or apprenticeship arrangements that involve work in exchange for instruction. Children and their parents provide or seek out such on-the-job training either as a complement to formal education or as an alternative to it, especially when schools are unavailable or unsatisfactory.

Education planners sometimes assume that acquiring livelihood skills from family and informal apprenticeships will disappear with traditional societies, presumably to be replaced by more formalized training systems. Present trends suggest the contrary, however. In fact, economists have long realized that as developing countries industrialize and urbanize, they spawn an increasing number and variety of small enterprises. These small enterprises typically produce their own human resources on the job, which is the most efficient way to obtain the skilled help they need. These jobs are by no means all as badly paid and futureless as once was assumed. It is relatively common for skilled and semi-skilled informal sector workers to be more employable and earn more than do many highly educated peers without a practical trade. The World Bank, ILO, regional development banks, and many other national and international development programs have long recognized that most new employment in many countries is generated by small undertakings in the informal or quasi-formal sector, often the most dynamic part of the economy. In most countries, however, there are few links between the informal sector and the formal school system, which tends to ignore or even deprecate it.

It is well understood that economic progress in today's developing countries increasingly depends on skills that require a good education. There is no question about the urgent need to educate all children. What gets lost, however, is that they also increasingly depend on certain kinds of skills—including modern industrial skills—young people typically learn through work. The skills necessary to generate the most common products, services, and livelihoods that sustain much of the world's population are learned in most developing countries not in formal education settings, but on the job through work, often starting by early adolescence. More people live from farming than from any other type of economic activity. Almost all of them acquire their agricultural knowledge and skills through work beginning from an early age. The crops they raise feed the local population and produce exports that are the economic backbone of many countries. At the moment there is no other sufficiently developed organizational structure able to maintain and transmit to so many young people the complex stock of highly varied and specific agricultural knowledge that today feeds much of the world. Formal education systems are totally unprepared and unequipped to assume such a massive and important

training role. Non-farmers greatly underestimate the sophisticated skills it takes to wrest a livelihood from the small and often marginal farms worked by the rural poor. This is knowledge that even elaborate networks of vocational schools, agricultural extension services, and farmer training centers have not been able to provide to the many small farmers who need it.

In developing country cities, the informal sector tradesmen and other workers who keep the urban system functioning often learn their skills as children or adolescents from working with family or other skilled adults. It is they who repair the vehicles, construct the buildings, cook the restaurant food, and manufacture the myriad small items that maintain increasingly industrialized cities. As many education planners already know, sporadic attempts to replace urban informal apprenticeships with state-sponsored vocational education often have been considered costly failures, and vocational school graduates often have tended to come out less employable than were children who learned the same trades through work on the job. Formalized vocational education seems to have worked best in Northern Europe.

Although schools and training programs can indeed make limited valuable contributions to preparing youngsters to farm, manufacture, or mother, they are not in a position to assume the major social responsibility for any of these huge learning tasks. For the foreseeable future, children and youth will continue to learn these skills so essential to their own and their countries' survival mostly through participation in work. Thus developing country educators should not seek to replace on-the-job learning with vocational or other forms of formal training, which is impractical, but should adopt strategies that complement, reinforce, and improve training on the job. This can be done, for example, by upgrading traditional apprenticeships so that they are safe and useful for children, at the same time providing young apprentices with part-time schooling support. This is a strategy that has been much discussed inside the ILO and is being explored by IPEC. ILO-IPEC supports various projects of this type in West Africa, such as one with shop owners and their apprentices in Benin.

While the training that children receive through work can be considered a benefit, it also may come at the cost of conditions that are unacceptable or abusive. Very often children who learn something through work are nevertheless engaged in work or working conditions that are also oppressive, hazardous, demeaning or otherwise inappropriate for them. Those mistreating children in the workplace may include family members and government authorities as well as non-family employers. In some societies, harsh treatment of children sometimes is even considered an essential part of their training. For example, in many traditional apprenticeship systems the master is expected to act as a parent substitute and to discipline the apprentice rigorously. This was even true in many parts of Europe and North America up to the twentieth century. In some places, even girls learning domestic skills are purposely treated severely in order to prepare and harden them for the expected rigors of marriage. But in other cases, children trying to learn a trade on the job are simply exploited by unscrupulous employers who squeeze the most out of them while providing little or no useful instruction. The unacceptable dangers and exploitation that motivate campaigns against child labor are real and need to be taken seriously. The fact that children are learning on the job should not justify inaction to correct workplace abuses to which they may be subjected.

There is research literature demonstrating that some working children may learn even certain supposedly "academic" skills more successfully through their work than in the classroom. For example, child street traders in Brazil have shown an ability to perform in their heads complex arithmetic problems that they are unable to solve with pen and paper instruments in the

classroom. They clearly learn mathematical processes at work that surpass what they learn at least at the primary school level, and they are more able to make practical use of them. The interpretation of this replicable finding is still open to discussion, but a good guess is that an engaged, social context of work may be superior for learning at least some skills to a more isolated and de-contextualized school classroom.

## **Recent Studies on the Relationship Between School and Work**

There is a growing scholarly literature on the relationship between school and work, which increasingly comes from economists and major institutions such as university institutes and the World Bank. As always, much of the available literature is based on ethnographic field studies and project reporting. But some of the more interesting recent research involves quantitative analysis of census, household survey, international comparative testing, and other large-scale data collected for purposes other than studying the relationship between children's education and their work. Many of the findings from analysis of these pre-existing large data sets are interesting and suggestive, and "policy analysis" studies of this type are now considered by many to be at the leading edge of child labor research. With further methodological development, this approach may well evolve into an important policy tool. For the time being, however, such studies remain of limited practical use in planning either education or child labor policy. Although they are capable of revealing unexpected associations between variables, which makes them valuable, they so far offer relatively little insight into the factors and dynamics that are of critical importance in deciding whether, why, where, and how to intervene in a situation.

## IV. INTERVENTIONS THROUGH EDUCATION

Given the diversity of child labor perspectives, there is a surprising amount of consensus regarding what education can and should do to combat abusive child labor. While practical programs at the field level would be likely to reflect in their details the particular policy frameworks within which they are mounted, there are relatively few major differences of opinion regarding the central issues. Following are general points of substantial expert agreement regarding preventive, protective, and developmental education interventions. Such disagreements as exist tend to collect around technical issues—such as the relative merits and roles of non-formal education vs. formal schooling—which are unrelated to the different policy perspectives.

### **Preventive Interventions: Keeping Children in School and Away from Abusive Work**

Many claim from experience that it is more effective and efficient to use educational interventions to prevent children from entering abusive work situations than to bring them back once they are caught up in them. This could be where most investment should be targeted. For the most part, such preventative measures would not specifically target working children, but involve raising the accessibility and quality of education for all children of the poor, a mainstream concern. There is a need, however, to provide outreach to certain hard-to-reach groups of working children who could be particularly vulnerable to moving into abusive work situations. There is wide agreement that policies and programs should:

#### *1. Clean up education's act so that it is not part of the problem.*

Both the literature and experience overwhelmingly indicates that school system failures are one of the most important causes of child labor. Many children fleeing school end up in abusive forms of child labor. In some countries, there is reason to think that a majority of school-aged children working full-time are children who either could not get into school or abandoned it out of disillusion.

- ◆ Absolute priority should be devoted to ending physical and mental abuse by teachers and creating a welcoming school environment for all children. In some countries and school systems, physical and mental abuse appears to be generally endemic, and these cases need intensive work. Where this is an issue, school must first of all be made less abusive than abusive work. There is considerable experience in trying to make the classroom more welcoming. For example, the “joyful learning” movement in India uses songs, games, and other activities popular with children as learning vehicles.
- ◆ Schools also must be made truly functional—with basic facilities, reading and writing materials, and teachers who actually show up each day and teach.
- ◆ In a related vein, ways need to be found to control rampant education system corruption where it is endemic, since it falls most heavily on the poor in general, and working children in particular.

Attention also needs to be devoted to the problem of children who are kept away from school by its expense. Children should not have to work in order to pay their school expenses. Either such expenses must be reduced to a level bearable for the poor, or cash or in-kind subsidies must be provided to cover at least part of these costs. There is some experience with reducing expenses to the poor, and a great deal of it is in providing either cash or in-kind subsidies. Brazil, for example, has experimented with providing “scholarship” subsidies to poor families, conditioned on children’s regular school attendance. School attendance and completions rose significantly in experimental projects, and based on their success the government now is establishing a national program. While making school financially accessible for all children can significantly improve enrollments and retentions, it is not clear that the provision of subsidies is sustainable in the poorest countries where they are most needed apart from external assistance. More study and experimentation is needed on the sustainability of subsidies to make it less necessary for children to work and more feasible for them to attend school.

## *2. Improve school quality and relevance.*

There is ample evidence that children are more likely to attend and succeed in high quality schools than in those that are dull and low performing. There are many successful examples showing that improvement of school quality and relevance will attract and retain students who otherwise would be likely to drop out and work. A well-known example is the Escuela Nueva program in Colombia, which was initiated to reach and retain children who were abandoning school to work in agriculture. A complete reform program included not only flexibility to adjust school calendars to the agricultural season, but also a major effort to improve the quality of teaching and to encourage community participation in decisions about school process and curriculum. Enrollments, attendance, completions and performance indicators all rose substantially. Experiences from various parts of the world report similar results.

## *3. Reach out to working children with special needs.*

Some working children are unable or unwilling to frequent schools or non-formal education program sites. In such instances, it is often necessary to carry education to them. This involves accepting and dealing with their working status at least for the time being. There are many examples of “sidewalk schools,” non-formal classes in shops and other workplaces, classrooms set up in areas where working children congregate, literacy classes for maids in homes, and many other outreach programs. A whole profession of street educator has evolved in some countries where reaching out to street children has become a major task. In Brazil, for example, the well-known Axe program in Salvador seeks out children on the streets, makes contact with them, and begins an educational process with them where they are. The street educators then gradually discuss with them the advantages of entering a more structured educational activity, at which point they may enter a non-formal education program specially tailored to maintain their interest, provide income through safe work, and prepare them academically for subsequent insertion into the regular school system. The process may take several months or a couple of years, depending on the child. While most outreach programs are operated by non-governmental organizations, there is no inherent reason that formal school systems could not do equally well if properly interested and willing to innovate. It may take special encouragement and outside funding, however, to convince formal school systems to initiate creative outreach practices of this type.



## Protective Interventions: Helping Protect Working Children Against Abuse

Education can play an important role in providing working children with information and support they need to help protect them from abusive work situations. On the whole, this is something that non-formal education programs have engaged in much more and seem to do better than formal school systems. However, the great social reach of formal school systems provides such an advantage that it may be worth experimenting with ways to make whole systems more responsive to the protection and needs of children who work. Education programs need to:

### *1. Monitor the condition of working children.*

Non-formal education programs have long been utilized as a structure through which to regularly monitor the health and situation of working children. Many have referral mechanisms through which children in need of health care can be routed to proper medical services, or abused children can be provided with shelter and alternative care. In other cases, program staff, and sometimes other children, visit employers considered unjust or abusive in order to intervene. This seems to be a function that few formal schools have been willing to take on—at least there is little record of such attempts—although there is no reason why they could not perform this function competently. It is a possibility that should be explored.

Some non-formal education programs have fielded remarkable experiences of this type. In India, the Concern for Working Children (CWC) organization, in partnership with Bhima Sangha, a working children's association in Karnataka, organizes and trains village children to monitor and record the work and conditions of every child in the village as part of its education development program. It looks for ways to avoid harmful work for children and to remedy the situation for those in it. Suggestions are then discussed with the local government and action taken, particularly toward getting all children into school. MVF in Andhra Pradesh also makes use of community level monitoring, mostly by parent committees, in this case to ensure that no child drops out of school to go to work. This is an integral part of its campaign to remove children from work and get them into school.

### *2. Enable children to better protect themselves.*

Many non-formal education programs, and some formal schools, instruct children on workplace dangers and how to recognize, avoid, or cope with them. Child Workers in Asia, for example, has produced teaching materials for use by students and teachers in public schools. Such material should be a part of the life skills taught in the basic education curriculum. Children should learn about labor laws and rules and how to make use of them, and they should be made aware of, and put in contact with, programs and other resources they can turn to for help if needed. Some programs teach about trade unions, providing even some organization and negotiation skills. Some non-formal education programs go so far as to group working children into groups by occupation and to help them reflect on and learn from their work and life experience. Some non-formal education programs for working children also provide counseling. Information of this type can be incorporated into both formal and non-formal education curricula. ILO-IPEC has produced a child labor education kit, primarily for teachers and students in industrialized country schools.



### *3. Support children through education for families, employers, and communities.*

Non-formal education programs for working children have long recognized that protecting children against work abuse involves providing information and education to parents, employers, community leaders, and others in order to make them aware of workplace threats to children and to encourage them either to eliminate the threats or move children out of dangerous work. There is now a great deal of experience with applying such educational outreach to adults. While success is not guaranteed, there seems to have been enough of it to justify making activities of this type routine. Again, however, this has been the province primarily of non-formal education programs, but it is something that formal schools could become more involved in.

### **Developmental Interventions: Offering Children Opportunities**

Formal education systems have taken little responsibility for what happens to children they educate outside the classroom, including at work. Many non-formal education programs, however, have been involved in creating employment opportunities for adults so that children do not have to work, or have established safe work alternatives for children who need the income. Some of these have become quite successful and well known—microcredit schemes for Bangladesh mothers or sheltered workshops for Brazilian children are well known. It is likely, however, that many more have failed, for such projects can be demanding to operate and sustain. While such activities typically are small and local, there have been some larger experiments along this line. For example, a “brigade” education model in which school provides work experience, academic instruction, and skill training was supported for some years in Botswana and Zimbabwe. It proved difficult to maintain economically on its own, however, and was equally difficult to incorporate into formal education systems. The values, objectives and processes of such work-based education programs differ so greatly from those of most formal school systems that it can be almost impossible to integrate the two. Educators need to find better ways to create operational links between education and income generation.

Some non-formal education programs have placed great importance on social mobilization in support of the protection of working children and the elimination of abusive child work, bringing pressure on policy makers, government administrators, employers, and others to observe standards of child rights and welfare. In Brazil, campaigns of this type succeeded in making changes in the national constitution and setting up local child protection councils to monitor the situation of children—notably including working children—and to intervene where necessary. Education can almost everywhere play a more active role in creating public awareness about abusive child labor and the need to educate all children. This is also an appropriate task for teacher-parent organizations, and international federations of teachers’ unions.

## V. ESSENTIAL PLANNING PROCESS

The success of any initiative to combat abusive child labor depends, at least in part, on the careful consideration and execution of three important steps: conducting a situation analysis; securing stakeholder involvement; and evaluating program impact. Each of those is described below.

### Situation Analysis

The general finding that child labor problems vary enormously with their context and can be successfully attacked only through interventions adapted to that context suggests that policies and programs to attack those problems must start by understanding that context very well. That usually must be done through some form of situation analysis or rapid assessment. The importance of such analysis is often unappreciated, but it is difficult to overstate. Virtually all writers and organizations providing recommendations on how to attack child labor emphasize the need for good situation analysis as a guide to action.

Some donors have reportedly been reluctant to fund what they see as “research,” preferring to move directly to action. The more we learn, however, the more evident it becomes that there are no shortcuts. Without rigorous empirical analysis, we seldom really know what the problem is and we tend to be unclear, or simply wrong, about what most needs to be done, or how to do it. Situation analysis is therefore an essential first step.

### *Essential Information*

Guides to situation analysis with respect to child labor vary, but in general it is clear that at least the following need to be very well understood:

- ◆ Demographic characteristics of working children, their families, and communities.
- ◆ The purpose, organization, conditions, continuity, and social context of child work, or at least the most important kinds, including all common kinds or conditions of work that are harmful to children.
- ◆ How children’s work relates to their family and other social bonds. Anthropology shows that work is not just an economic activity. It often is a key instrument of family and community solidarity, and naive interventions in it can prejudice children’s claims to family support and acceptance or retard their development within the family structure.
- ◆ Positive and negative effects of work on children and their families. Most work done by children has both positive and negative aspects. The big question is, “Which predominates?” Most experts now emphasize the importance of identifying not only what is dangerous or otherwise inappropriate in particular children’s work, but also what is beneficial in terms of earnings, self and family esteem, skills acquisition, and so forth.
- ◆ Interventions in child work, and their positive/negative effects on children. Very often inappropriate interventions in children’s work (e.g., police violence in chasing away street-trading children) are a major danger of working. It is important to include interventions in children’s work as part of the work environment being analyzed.

- ◆ Availability and quality of education for disadvantaged and working children. A very rigorous analysis may be needed here, for education systems in many countries have considerably exaggerated their achievements in bringing functional schools of reasonable quality to the poor in rural and urban periphery areas. Education ministries and school systems need to be much more self-critical and to honestly assess both the academic and the social productivity of schooling. It also is necessary here to check for discrimination or exclusion of children in the worst forms of child labor, such as prostitution and various kinds of dirty and extremely low status work, such as garbage picking. In many places, teachers or fellow students may systematically force these children out of school.
- ◆ Working children's formal and non-formal education participation and achievement vis-à-vis non-working children of like background. Achievement needs to be measured in terms of actual literacy, numeracy, and other skills reached rather than grades completed or other institutional surrogate indicators.
- ◆ Child and family perception and evaluation of locally available education.
- ◆ Comparative economic benefits of school, work, and work-study combination for children of the precise problem groups and areas. This requires economic analysis based on fieldwork.

### *Understanding the Relationship Between Education and Child Labor*

Recent research approaching some of the policy issues has tended to focus on the question of how children's work affects their participation and performance in school. As was pointed out earlier, this research tends to show a negative relationship between child work and school attendance and achievement. When planning education for working children, however, it is extremely important to "get inside" such broad generalizations in order to understand the dynamics involved. It seems increasingly likely that this relationship at the grossest general level actually obscures a host of more complex and contradictory relationships that have to be taken into consideration in order to focus education effectively. For example, some studies have found that children working a low number of hours (always under 20 hours per week) actually attend and perform better in school than do their non-working counterparts. It may be that students who work longer hours account for the apparent overall negative relationship between school and work in these studies. There is also a big issue in determining the direction of causality. While most assume that work causes lower school attendance and performance, there is substantial evidence that many children doing poorly in school turn to and value work as a compensatory activity. There also is some evidence that certain prior variables—such as poverty—may independently contribute to both poor school performance and propensity toward work. Such findings encourage a more nuanced view of the relationships between school and work. Education planners need to realize that the critically important relations between school and work probably are obscured in gross correlations, and that they should disaggregate such figures when possible to clarify the dynamics within them.

This also suggests the need for rigorous assessment of education policies and approaches in terms of their actual impact on working children and their non-working peers, especially in poor rural and urban periphery communities. One commonly hears from human resource economists and others that parents and children underestimate the true value of education. This assertion needs to be put to the test. Whereas this may sometimes seem to be the case from a macro-economic point of view, micro-economists are more inclined to doubt the likelihood that families

would make such a mistake based on their observation of others in their community or general circumstance.

An alternative hypothesis, which may be more consistent with economic principles, is that families and children make decisions about the alternatives of school and work actually available to them. If the schools accessible to them actually teach children and if what children learn there potentially promises benefits—especially increased income or employment possibilities—even very poor families seem in most places to make unusual efforts to educate their offspring. If they do otherwise, it may be a signal that the schools either do not succeed in teaching children or that the schooling benefit to that particular population may be small. Economic returns on schooling can be limited by caste, gender, ethnic, race, class, religious, political or other types of labor market discrimination that restrain advancement by disfavored groups regardless of education.

Under any circumstance, it is important to understand precisely how children and their families perceive the education and work alternatives available to them, and why they make the decisions they do. Without this understanding, it will be difficult to plan appropriate interventions in either children's work or the education offered to them.

### *Organizing Successful Situation Analysis*

Experience has demonstrated that substantial benefits can accrue from conducting the situation analysis through a team made up of representatives of all the key stakeholder groups and capitalizing on work already done. A jointly conducted situation analysis may be the best guarantee of cooperative efforts afterward. Even where such materials are available, three to six months may be needed to produce a credible situation analysis for new interventions. In many countries, especially those in which ILO-IPEC and UNICEF have had child labor programs, one or more situation analyses of child labor may already have been completed, sometimes at considerable effort and expense.

UNICEF and the ILO have over several years worked together to hone a rapid assessment methodology for child labor situation analysis, which allows for reasonably accurate and representative information to be collected in a reasonably short amount of time and at minimal expense. It is not an adequate tool for estimating quantities—such as how many children work in dangerous agricultural activities—which requires far more elaborate and expensive survey instruments. It can, however, quickly identify the main types of problems that may exist, which usually is adequate to initiate the early stages of program development and planning.

The ILO also has a far more ambitious child labor survey program, which has developed statistical studies based on representative sampling and therefore capable of estimating relative quantities. It also utilizes changed definitions of “work” so that it can pick up housework, which has been excluded under earlier definitions. This modified definition is especially important for girls, because housework can be so time-consuming and can keep children from school. These methods and studies are somewhat controversial, even within the ILO, and should be examined with care before being utilized as reliable sources. But where they are deemed by inspection to be of adequate quality, they can be a very helpful source.

The World Bank provides access to census and living standards measurement survey data on a number of countries, and this information can be especially useful in teasing out relationships between children's work, schooling and (sometimes) poverty. It has itself already completed such analyses for several countries and is considering others. These data are among the highest quality statistical information available on developing countries, and, for those subjects it covers, it is perhaps the most reliable of all quantitative data sources.

In many places, there also has been a great deal of academic and NGO analysis. In large countries like India or Brazil, a substantial amount of already-existing material can support a substantial desk analysis supplemented perhaps by only occasional field work in particular areas or groups of special interest.

It's important to note that in many developing countries, education data collected through school system reporting is so unreliable as to be useless, or worse. It often leaves the impression that schools are functioning when they are not, that teachers are present when they are not, that enrolled students attend class when they do not, and that children learn in class when they do not. In many places, accurate information about school operations and performance can be collected only through field visits.

## **Involving Stakeholders**

ILO, UNICEF, World Bank, NGO, and other expert commentators on child labor point out the limits of state influence and the need to involve a wide variety of social actors if the workplace abuse of children is to be eliminated, or even reduced. In recent years, this advice has been increasingly phrased in terms of "stakeholders:" those who gain or lose either from the current situation or from changing it. This obviously must include children themselves, their families, employers, NGOs, local unions or other workers' organizations, and community institutions such as schools and municipal government.

In fact, these tend to be precisely the groups excluded from most current policy-making about child labor, which occurs for the most part at the national level and involves only individuals having very limited understanding of the situations involved. Different stakeholders often interpret and react to the same information in different ways, and it is important to know about such divergent views. Even more importantly, when people learn together about a situation and together define the problem(s), as happens during a joint situation analysis, they also find it easier to agree on interventions and work together afterward.

Many have wryly noted that child labor provides an example, par excellence, of distorted social policy-making, where elites having little or no understanding of the situation to make decisions for the excluded serve the interests of the deciding power structure more than those of the children and poor they are ostensibly established to protect. The result is that so many child labor interventions popular among political and economic elites either have been purposely subverted by working children and other local stakeholders or apparently have left children worse rather than better off.



One important way to make policy more effective and engage stakeholders is to decentralize key parts decision making to levels that take account of local conditions and agreements. There are many ways of doing this. One is to place decision-making power in the hands of municipal rather than national government, and in many countries local government plays a key role at least in implementing social policies even if it does not make them. Another strategy is to bring the various stakeholder groups together in ad hoc or regularized community councils addressing child labor problems. In fact, some cities now have councils for dealing especially with working and street children. Brazil is trying a combination of these two approaches through a federally mandated system of municipal child protection councils in which local government and elected delegates from local groups and non-governmental organizations have equal representation and power. UNICEF is currently evaluating this experience to see what can be learned from it.

At the level of national and international policy, there has been growing criticism that the de facto definition of child labor as a labor issue, and consequently making it primarily a labor ministry responsibility, has allowed a few stakeholders to control policy and advance their own agendas by excluding other even more important stakeholders and their interests. This complaint stems in part from the increasing presence and influence of child rights values in the issue, in part from new actors such as development banks and working children's own organizations, and in part from evolving ideas about democratic procedures and the participation of policy and program "beneficiaries" in defining the parameters of assistance to them. The question of how to broaden official policy perspectives on child labor is closely related to that of how to bring more stakeholders into the policy-making process, an issue that has yet to be adequately resolved.

At the national level, the ILO-IPEC program has established an inter-institutional, multi-perspective steering committee in each country where it operates. The breadth and independence of these committees varies widely, but the general consensus seems to be that they represent a definite, but still inadequate, step in the right direction. One of their problems is that they still must work within the policy parameters of the IPEC program that, as an ILO activity, still basically approaches child labor from a labor policy perspective and institutional framework overseen by just the three tripartite partners comprising the ILO.

UNICEF has in some countries (e.g., Bangladesh) employed elaborate and innovative procedures to bring a wide variety of stakeholders into the planning of its national child labor activities, but even those activities must fit certain organizational priorities and guidelines. The World Bank has an advisory council of stakeholders for its child labor program, which also is limited by the institution's own economic development mandate, goals, and doctrines. Such institutional limitations suggest the need for dialogue outside of any one institutional point of view. An attempt to provide this sort of forum and cooperative framework exists in Southeast Asia. International, national, and NGO organizations working in child labor have funded and established a regional council complete with its own office, director, and program of joint action.

One of the more heated issues in the subject of child labor these days has to do with the participation of children in contributing to national and international policy-making. The preponderance of international expertise on child labor agrees that, for purely pragmatic reasons, children need to be involved in planning action for their own protection. Programs planned without their participation are less likely to have credibility with them and to work. Also, working children have a clear right under Article 12 of the CRC to make their voices heard, and that right inheres in their organizations as well as to each individual. This is no longer a matter

of preference or convenience, but of rights claimed and already granted by international agreement and precedence. On the other hand, nobody would claim that an effective method has yet been discovered and is ready for widespread use. Any project that intends to reach working children with benefits needs to plan how to include input from them. (In this context we should point out, that there remains a theoretical question regarding whether a right granted at the national level carries over to the international, but that is now being treated as a moot question with both levels being considered open to the claim of rights.)

There are two modes. One is research structured in such a way as to let children make their views known. Much work is now being done with children's focus groups, and social scientists in Europe have been working on the methodology and training practitioners in it. For example, the large Bangladesh education project for working children (see Chapter VI) has made liberal use of children's focus groups for both evaluation and planning. Through them, it has discovered highly valuable information that otherwise would not have come to light. Further description about this program will be contained within the second in this series of papers. The second means of participation is direct partnership between adults and children in making certain decisions. In places like Peru and India, this model is being explored with interesting and promising results. In the US context, work of this type can seem strange and "flaky," almost irrelevant. But it is taken much more seriously elsewhere, and to good advantage, even in the World Bank, which has published a favorable study on the issue. USAID would do very well to consider a properly planned role, perhaps at the national level, for working children's participation in planning its program for utilizing education to combat abusive work.

### **Evaluating Impact: What Is a Satisfactory Child Labor Outcome?**

"What comprises a desirable outcome?" and "What is a success?" For many years, the most basic conventional policy objective has been to remove children from labor markets, and success was defined primarily as reduction in the number of economically active children below given minimum age. The ILO, for instance, still thinks in these terms, as do most national labor ministries. In fewer instances, success also was defined, secondarily, as a reduction in the number of children working in hazardous conditions, and the ILO counts this as a success indicator as well. It has been more or less assumed that both society and children will be better off if these objectives are realized. However, some follow-up studies have shown that one may indeed reduce child labor and leave children worse off if the wrong methods are utilized. The interjection of child rights criteria into the policy environment has raised a different criterion for success—the best interests of the child.

There is a growing consensus that no program can legitimately be considered "successful" if it leaves children worse off than they were before. This trend is gradually being extended to include the families of working children as well. For example, can the removal of children from hazardous work be considered a true success if it results in poorer nutrition and health, or decreased school participation for younger siblings who suffer from the family income lost? What from a labor market perspective may appear to be a clear victory may, from a broader social policy viewpoint show up to be a waste of resources that has only shifted the problem from one group of poor children to another that is even more vulnerable. Because situations vary widely, program designers must begin with clear goals and a clearly defined target groups. (See page 2 for discussion on defining eligible target group.) The next path is to establish realistic goals and indicators of impact.

Technical discussion clearly is tending in the direction of employing broader rather than narrower criteria, regarding the child both holistically in its own right and as an integral part of a family. Accumulating research suggests that merely getting a child out of work (even hazardous work) and into school should not, by itself, be considered a criterion of success. It may hide important counter-productive results to children, families, and even broader society that must be taken into account before a responsible judgment about the social value of a policy or program can be made. School itself is not an end, but a means to learning and social mobility. Its success is evaluated not only by children's presence, but also by what they actually learn there, and by how what they learn helps them in their present and future lives. Education for working children must be evaluated according to its outcomes, not its inputs.

## VI. THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN REDUCING ABUSIVE CHILD LABOR: THE BANGLADESH EXAMPLE

There is not yet a great deal of experience in using education as a tool specifically intended to eliminate or reduce the worst forms of child labor, although a number of projects having this goal have now been started, especially with sponsorship from UNICEF and the ILO. The most significant single effort of this type in the world is a Bangladesh project, Basic Education for Hard to Reach Urban Children, which has targeted those in “hazardous” forms of child labor. Sponsored by the Ministry of Education with UNICEF support, the project serves about 350,000 of the poorest and most underserved urban children in Bangladesh. This project was intended to pioneer a way to deliver mass education to working children from the poorest families.

This project establishes non-formal education “learning centers” in areas where poor children involved in a variety of hazardous occupations are known to live and/or work. These centers are under the responsibility of local NGOs contracted to establish and run them. Teachers are drawn from the community and are specially trained for the project by a supervisory staff working for the Ministry of Education’s Division of Non-formal Education. The teachers, who are not credentialed to regular formal school standards, are involved in both recruiting and teaching target group children, and they deliver a special curriculum devised by the Division of NFE.

An interesting aspect of this project is that UNICEF and the Ministry have made ample, systematic use of child focus groups as a research instrument for learning what is needed and for receiving feedback about the progress of the schools. Unlike the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) program for removing children from garment industry employment to full-time education, this project neither intervenes directly in the labor market nor provides a subsidy for attending school. The MOU program schools were formed following a 1995 agreement between the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), UNICEF, and the ILO where the garment industry agreed to move all workers below age 14 within four months to appropriate education programs. The intent of the Basic Education for Hard to Reach Urban Children project is to try to keep the cost to a level that could realistically be supported by the government across the country, which the MOU model with its expensive subsidies and better-equipped schools, does not.

### Lessons Learned

After having run a few years, the Basic Education for Hard to Reach Urban Children project has encountered and dealt with problems that are likely to be generic to this type of undertaking. A lot already has been learned from this program:

- ◆ *Inclusion.* It has proven extremely difficult to go into an educationally underserved area and attempt to offer education only to certain working children—those in hazardous forms of employment. In fact, parents desperate to get their children into a decent school and children anxious to get there will find a way. They will even put children in hazardous work to make them eligible, just as they earlier put children into garment factories so that they could be fired as underage and made eligible for the scholarships to the MOU schools in Bangladesh. Despite all the training and administrative pressure brought to bear during the recruitment process, it has not been possible to ensure that more than half of the chairs are filled with students in hazardous work. Also, it has been

difficult to keep dropouts much below the rates for regular government schools, at least early on. Since labor market and job attachment are extremely volatile, children may be in such work for only brief periods. And if they stop working because they are in school, they are no longer in hazardous work. These and other conundrums have raised serious questions about the feasibility—or even the theoretical justification—of focusing on this particular group of children within a seriously underserved area. In the case of Bangladesh, this may have been an essentially political priority that has no real technical justification. Serious questions need to be asked about the viability of targeting education services in this way. A more viable approach might have been to assure full education opportunity to all children in those slum areas from which most young workers in hazardous work come.

- ◆ *School discipline.* Child workers can be tough and unruly challenges to school decorum. Partially as a result, there is some indication that children typically in hazardous or other “worst forms” of education can suffer discrimination at the hands of teachers and other children. Despite intensive training of teachers to use gentle, modern teaching methods with children in the Bangladesh project, evaluation interviews with students turned up child beatings and other violent punishments roughly on par with government schools where such punishments are accepted and expected. Humiliated children drop out.
- ◆ *Instruction.* Working children have only a few hours a day to study, so literacy classes take up nearly all the time. That leaves little left over for life skills or other educational objectives potentially useful to the children. In terms of the objective of removing children from hazardous work, there is little indication that education, by itself, necessarily has that ability. If children work part time, before or after school, they may still be involved in dangerous occupations. Just turning up in school has limited capacity to change workplace dangers unless the school seriously targets that purpose with innovative and energetic measures matched to the circumstances and context. That is not likely under most government school systems, formal or non-formal, especially in the absence of major institutional reform initiatives from Ministry of Education officials.
- ◆ *Organization.* It is essential to get input from children and teachers in order to make continuous improvements in adapting schools to local conditions and needs. Bureaucratic interests, a major problem in ministries of education, can be overcome only with constant pressure and precise information from below.

The Basic Education for Hard to Reach Urban Children project is making use of much that has been known or thought to date about how to make education a useful tool in reaching working children and reducing abuses against them. The real-life lesson, learned from a well-funded and staffed project with three years of very hard experience in this area, is that we still do not know very much and that there are no reliable road maps. It may even be that targeting education specifically and exclusively on the worst forms of child labor is a bad idea. That remains to be seen. It is clear, however, that working children, such as these, could not have been reached without some sort of special program organized and designed to meet their situation. Any activity trying to use education to eliminate abusive child labor is at this time inevitably experimental, and needs to be planned and evaluated accordingly.



(The second in this series of three ECACL publications will look more closely at lessons learned using non-formal and formal basic education to combat abusive child labor. The third in this series will address incentives, scholarships, and other approaches and the role these play in combating abusive child labor.)

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William E. Myers, Visiting Scholar in the Department of Human and Community Development at the University of California at Davis, is an international consultant focusing on child rights and welfare in developing countries, with special interest in child work and education issues. He obtained his Doctorate of Education from Harvard University Graduate School of Education, where he specialized in the planning of non-formal education. He also holds a Master's of Public Administration from Harvard's John F. Kennedy School, where his main interest was in development administration.

Dr. Myers has a long history in child labor issues. He is a strong and unequivocal advocate of abolishing abusive child labor and has been working toward that end for over twenty years. In his early career, he was a US Peace Corps volunteer in Panama, and subsequently an Associate Peace Corps Representative both in that country and Brazil. Back in the US, he helped administer a model employment training program for disadvantaged youth and young adults in Tennessee, and afterward headed up rural employment and training programs for the Employment Development Department of the State of California. In that capacity he helped start and support special employment and training programs for migrant and seasonal farm workers. During that period, on loan to the US Department of Agriculture and Department of Labor, he helped establish and chair a special task force on agricultural labor.

He subsequently joined UNICEF, where he was first posted as a social welfare advisor to the Government of Brazil, where his main effort was devoted to helping develop and supervise a joint Government-UNICEF program to address the problems of that country's street children, later expanded to include working children more generally. He then assisted UNICEF in drafting a new policy to govern its work with 'children in especially difficult circumstances'. After an interim as a consultant on child labor and related issues for UNICEF, ILO, and other agencies, he returned to UNICEF to establish its program for Brazil's Amazon region, where the main challenge was to establish a sustainable development program designed to benefit the poor and their children. Afterward, he transferred to the International Labor Office in Geneva, where he served first as coordinator of the interdepartmental program on child labor, and then as special assistant to the director of the Working Conditions and Environment Department, with main responsibility for child labor research and policy. He retired from the UN in 1996.

In addition to his practical fieldwork, Dr. Myers is one of the most prolific international authors on child labor issues. He co-authored two documents, “First Things First in Child Labor,” a 1995 joint ILO-UNICEF publication that called for official priority attention to the worst forms of child labor and helped lay the groundwork for the subsequent ILO Convention No. 182, and “What Works for Working Children,” a 1998 publication jointly sponsored and published by UNICEF and the Swedish Save the Children organization. He is the editor of “Protecting Working Children,” published in 1991 by UNICEF. He also is an author or co-author of numerous papers and articles on child labor and child rights issues, and has made presentations on child labor and other children’s policy issues in conferences, workshops, and seminars worldwide.

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